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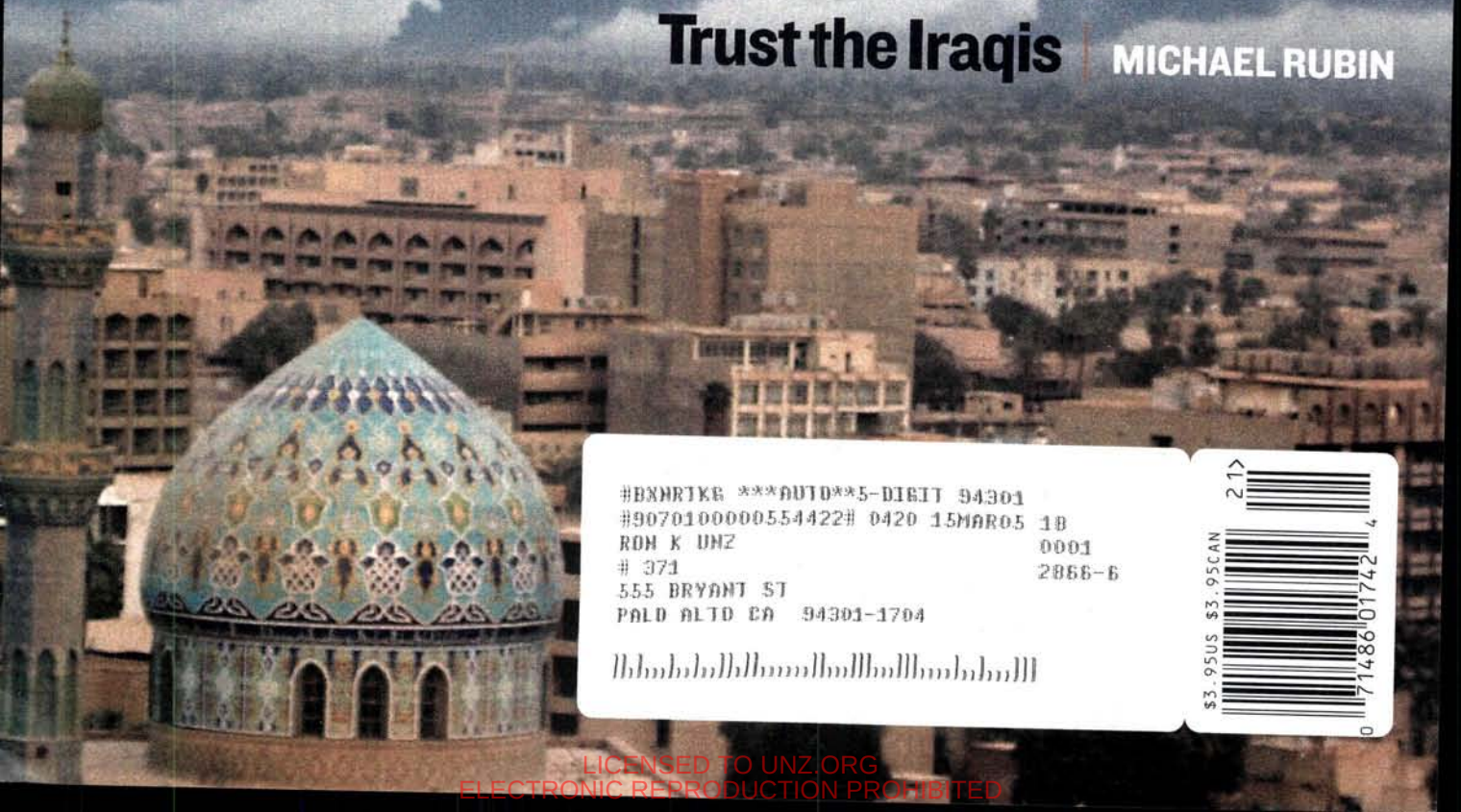

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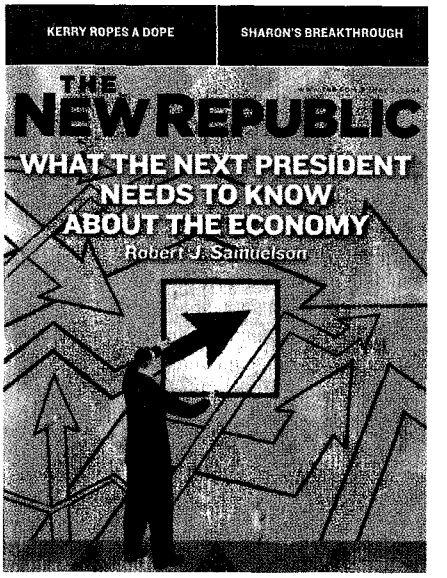
IN HIS BOOK REVIEW, ROBERT J. Samuelson argues that the nation's central budgetary problem is "federal spending, driven by higher retirement benefits for aging baby-boomers" ("What the Boom Forgot," May 3). Samuelson criticizes the Clinton administration for failing to address that problem by scaling back Social Security and Medicare. The projected imbalances in government retirement programs are indeed worrisome, and it is unfortunate that progress was not made in addressing them during the 1990s. But Samuelson does not adequately explain that the critical long-term expenditure problem lies in Medicare and Medicaid—far more so than in Social Security—and he overlooks the role of recent tax cuts in worsening the budget outlook.


KERRY ROPES A DOPE
SHARON'S BREAKTHROUGH
THE NEW REPUBLIC
WHAT THE NEXT PRESIDENT NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT THE ECONOMY
Robert J. Samuelson

Over the next 75 years, the cost of Medicare and Medicaid will rise by more than 10 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), due to an aging population and increases in health care costs. That is more than four times the expected increase in Social Security costs over the same period. The distinction matters because rising Medicare and Medicaid costs are harder to address. Some changes can certainly be instituted in Medicare, such as increased premiums. But the most critical task is to slow the rate of growth in health care costs system-wide—a tough proposition. Otherwise, it won't be possible to achieve significant savings in Medicare and Medicaid without substantially increasing the number of Americans who are uninsured or underinsured. Samuelson chides the Clinton administration for failing to tackle these big issues, but that administration at least addressed—albeit unsuccessfully—systemic health care reform.

Samuelson's analysis of long-term fiscal problems also leaves out the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts. If made permanent, these tax cuts will cost more than $10 trillion over the next 75 years—*three times* the entire Social Security shortfall over this period. One cannot bemoan Social Security's contribution to budget problems while barely mentioning the tax cuts. Unless one believes that long-term deficits can be closed entirely on the expenditure side—undesirable substantively and implausible politically—future generations would have faced heavier tax burdens than current generations, even *before* the recent tax cuts. Why impose larger fiscal burdens on future generations to finance tax cuts for current ones? Samuelson also gives short shrift to the "save Social Security first" strategy that the Clinton administration pursued in the late '90s. A key goal of that strategy was to use budget surpluses to pay off the national debt. Far from shifting costs to future genera-

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tions, as Samuelson charges, this policy sought to do the reverse—to *reduce* the debt burden we impose on future generations of taxpayers.

Another weakness of the review is that Samuelson appears of two minds on the dangers of deficits. In belittling the Clinton administration's deficit-reduction efforts, he argues that deficits "do not matter nearly as much as the public and many economists believe" and dismisses the reduction in the deficit by 2.5 percent of GDP between 1992 and 1995 as "such a small change." But, in arguing for significant cuts in retirement programs, he warns that "there could easily be circumstances" in which large, persistent deficits could "trigger a financial crisis" and "reduce economic growth." This inconsistency is reflected in his advocacy of Social Security benefit reductions to curb rising costs. The total increase in Social Security expenditures over the next 75 years will amount to 2.5 percent of GDP, the same amount he dismisses elsewhere as a small change.

Deficits do, in fact, matter. When the deficit fell by 2.5 percent of GDP between 1992 and 1995, the share of net private savings soaked up by the deficit fell by a full third, freeing more funds for investment. And, contrary to Samuelson's claim that deficits aren't that important because we can borrow from foreigners, such borrowing has real costs. The more than $2 trillion in debt to foreigners we have now accumulated effectively mortgages our domestic investments, since foreign creditors will capture a share of the returns on those investments. Samuelson also downplays the deficit-reduction efforts of the '90s by claiming that "good luck, more than good policy, produced the surpluses." Good policy in 1990 and 1993 got us from large, growing, and potentially dangerous deficits to smaller, stable, manageable deficits. Good luck—revenue growth associated with the late '90s boom and the post-cold-war reduction in military spending—then turned those small deficits into surpluses. It's true that good policy alone did not produce the surpluses. It is equally true that the surpluses would not have materialized without sound policy.

Today, after three years of large tax cuts and other adverse fiscal developments, the fiscal picture has darkened considerably. The fiscal policies of the '90s that Samuelson dismisses look better in hindsight, not worse.

J. BRADFORD DELONG
ROBERT GREENSTEIN
PETER R. ORSZAG

The authors are, respectively, professor of economics at the University of California at Berkeley, executive director of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution.

UPSET

LAST MONTH, I SAW THE THUNDER Nationals Final Round in New Hampshire ("Sunday!" April 12 & 19). Contrary to Clay Risen's assertion, Monster Truck races are not staged—Grave Digger lost to Bad News before a dumbfounded audience (seen nursing the hurt). Much to the chagrin of those little boys sporting green and black T-shirts and waving the pirate flag, no one was prepared for Grave Digger's demise. Grave Digger heard his dirge, and Bad News was there to sing it.

ROB COLVIN
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As they prepare for the July Convention, Democrats face a critical question – how wide a coalition do they want to build? The solid Democratic "base" represents less then 50% of the electorate. But many moderates and independents are closer to the Dems than Republicans on major issues. GOP victories in 2000 and 2002 required extensive borrowing of Democratic themes and programs.

Ruy Teixeira

In fact Republicans have only won national elections when they successfully portray themselves as closer to "average Americans" than "elitist" Democrats. Their strategy often succeeds because key swing groups like moderate white-collar suburbanites, socially tolerant evangelicals and non-union blue-collar workers and small businessmen clearly see that they are not represented in the Democratic Party in the same way as the party's traditional liberal constituencies.

In recent years, however, Republicans have embraced a bitter and vindictive vision of "politics as warfare" that alienates and disturbs many "middle of the road" voters. Democrats can win these voters' support if they offer them a meaningful "seat at the table" in the Democratic Party.

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Minority Report

TRB
FROM WASHINGTON

EVERY DAY, WITHDRAWAL FROM Iraq becomes a little less "unthinkable." Among politicians and pundits, the idea is still largely confined to the usual lefty suspects: Dennis Kucinich, Ralph Nader, Arundhati Roy. But the public is further along. According to this week's *Washington Post*/ABC News poll, 40 percent of Americans want to get out now, up seven points in the last month. Among Democrats, it is 53 percent. As one aide to John Kerry recently told *The New York Times*, the presumptive Democratic nominee feels pressured to do "what would be politically advantageous, declaring a timetable for getting out."

So far, mainstream politicians have ignored the calls for withdrawal. During the primaries, none of the leading Democratic contenders emphasized why Kucinich was wrong. And, today, Kerry is doing his best to avoid debating Iraq with Nader; he wouldn't even admit the two had discussed the issue during their meeting last week. That's a mistake. Leaving has become a real option—no more implausible than finding large new infusions of foreign troops or, for that matter, American ones. It deserves a more serious response than George W. Bush's "Americans are not the running kind." And, since the advocates of withdrawal are a fairly moralistic bunch, that response should begin with one, largely moral, question: What would American withdrawal mean for the Kurds?

Why single out the Kurds? First, because no group in Iraq has suffered so many U.S. betrayals. In 1975, Henry Kissinger helped Baghdad and Tehran resolve a long-standing border dispute. As part of the deal, the United States and Iran suddenly withdrew their backing for the Kurdish rebels in Iraq. The rebels were crushed, and tens of thousands of civilians fled across the border. Thirteen years later, the horrors had only increased, with Saddam Hussein murdering roughly 100,000 Kurds in his ghastly "Anfal" campaign. When Senator Claiborne Pell tried to impose sanctions on Iraq in 1988, the Reagan administration scuttled his legislation. And, when George H.W. Bush took office the following year, he doubled U.S. agricultural loans to Baghdad—money Saddam partially diverted to his military. Finally, at the close of the Gulf war in 1991, Bush famously called on Iraqis to rise up, only to watch as Saddam butchered them by the tens of thousands. Most of those killed were Arab Shia, but more than a million terrified Kurds became refugees again, escaping into Turkey or Iran.

The second reason we owe a special obligation to the Kurds is that, in the rest of Iraq, we are trying (with great difficulty) to build a democracy. In Kurdistan, we are protecting one that already exists. It's a lot easier to advocate withdrawal if you suspect Iraqis don't really want Western-style democracy anyway. But, in the Kurdish north, they want it with a vengeance. The two major Kurdish parties are both, by Middle Eastern standards, secular and liberal. Protected from Saddam by a no-fly zone, they contested a free election in 1992 and today co-exist peacefully in a regional parliament. That parliament has voted to punish honor killings and disregard aspects of the Iraqi transitional law that undermine women's rights. As Barham Saleh, prime minister of Eastern Kurdistan, recently told *The Wall Street Journal*, "If Iraq turns into an Islamic state, or an [Arab] nationalist state, we'll have no way to accept such a country."

It is hardly a coincidence, then, that the Kurds don't want the United States to leave. One of the key arguments for withdrawal is that the Iraqis are demanding it. But, while a February ABC News poll found that 60 percent of Arab Iraqis opposed the U.S. military presence, only 12 percent of Kurds did. Indeed, 82 percent of Kurds wanted us to stay.

It's not hard to understand why. If the United States leaves, the two most likely outcomes are an Iran-style Shia theocracy or a Lebanon-style civil war between ethnic militias. Either one would be disastrous for the Kurds. Iraq's Shia Islamists do not exactly welcome cultural diversity, especially when it is secular, liberal, and non-Arab. The leading Shia parties have never truly accepted the provision in the Transitional Administrative Law guaranteeing Kurdish voters an effective veto over a permanent Iraqi constitution. According to the ABC Poll, only 5 percent of Arabs, compared with 58 percent of Kurds, want a federal political system; 90 percent want to centralize power in Baghdad.

If Shia Islamists took power, one of the first things they would likely do is secure control of Kirkuk, the oil-rich city Kurds call their "Jerusalem." Kurds share the city with largely Shia Turkmen and with Arabs, some of whom were given Kurdish land by Saddam. Last August, after fighting between Kurds and Turkmen left a dozen dead, Shia in Baghdad angrily marched on the offices of a Kurdish party. This March, with tensions rising again, fighters from four Shia militias took up positions in Kirkuk. Two thousand members of Moqtada Al Sadr's Mahdi Army marched through the streets. To gauge how Sadr's forces might treat Kurds in the event of a U.S. withdrawal and a fight for Kirkuk, consider what they did to another non-Arab minority four months ago in the gypsy town of Qawliya: They burned it to the ground.

To be sure, the Kurds have their own militia, the *peshmerga*. But Shia militias enjoy the backing of Iran; Sunni groups can expect help from Saudi Arabia or Syria. The Kurds, by contrast, have no regional allies. Whether a post-occupation Iraq turned to theocracy or plunged into civil war, Iraq's Shia and Sunni would not let Kurdistan secede—it contains too many Arabs and too much oil. And Iraq's neighbors, particularly Turkey, which has its own restive Kurdish minority, would not either. Some in the withdrawal camp suggest replacing U.S. troops with a U.N. force. But anyone who thinks U.N. peacekeepers can protect Kurds against armed fundamentalist militias should do a Google search with the terms "Rwanda, 1994" or "Srebrenica, 1995."

A U.S. withdrawal would mean, in other words, the likely destruction of the decent, liberal society the Kurds have created under U.S. protection for the last 13 years. And that could well leave thousands more dead Kurds on America's conscience. Whatever you think about America's unhappy Iraq adventure, nothing we have so far done—including Abu Ghraib—would be as shameful as that. Before the percentage of Americans advocating withdrawal tops 50 percent, mainstream politicians need to say so.

PETER BEINART

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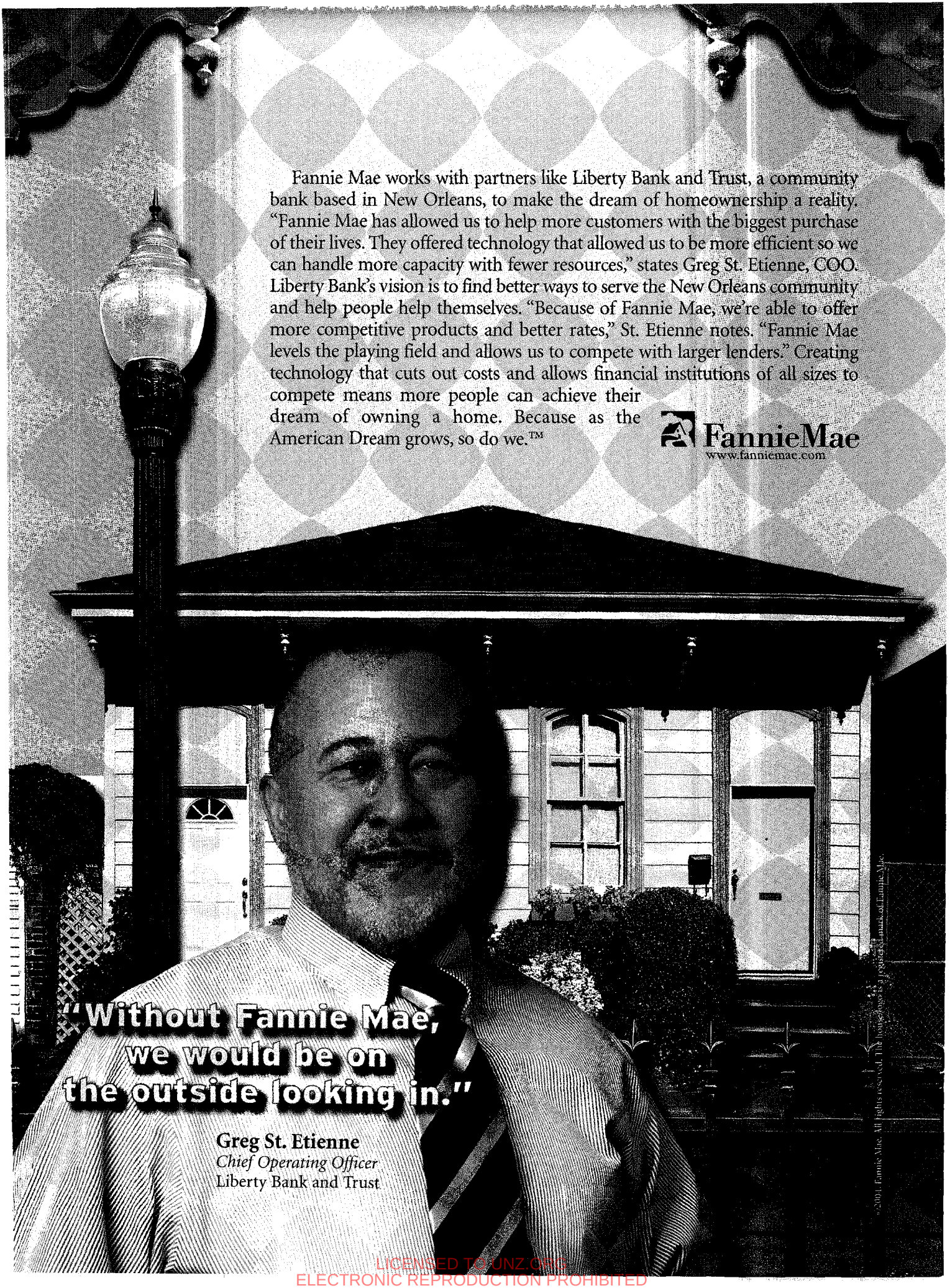

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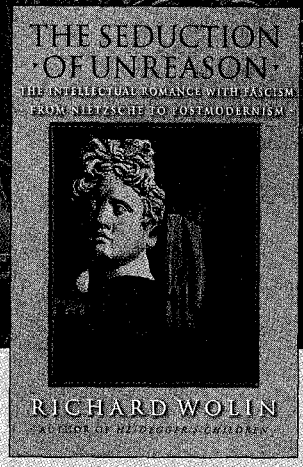

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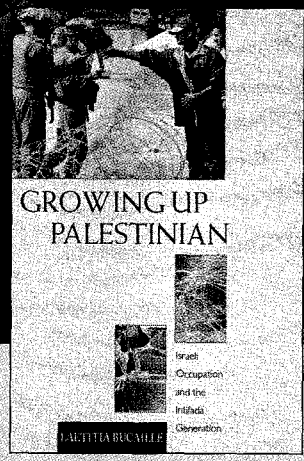

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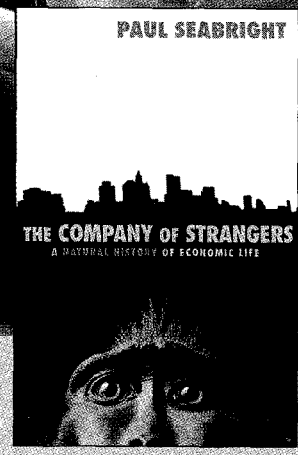

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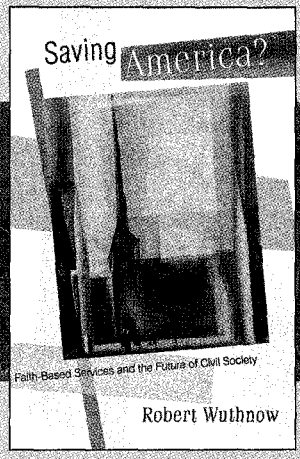

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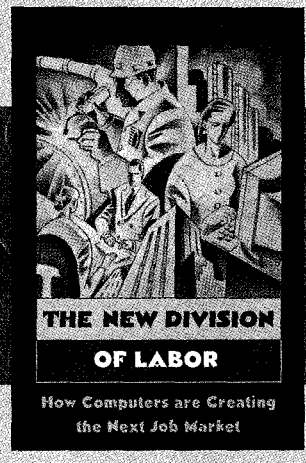

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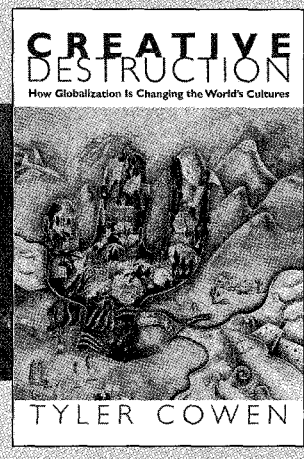

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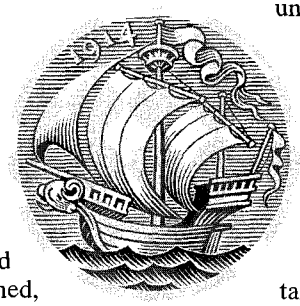
Gas Bag

THE LIST OF societal ills for which the Bush administration is partly or completely to blame is staggeringly long. A partial accounting includes: a failure to plan for Iraq's reconstruction, misleading the public about the costs of the war and the imminence of the weapons threat, the spiraling budget deficit, higher income inequality, inadequate homeland security, lack of progress on the health care crisis, and the fracturing of the national unity that followed the September 11 attacks. And yet, in recent days, John Kerry has devoted less attention to any of these maladies than to one for which George W. Bush is, at most, only tangentially responsible: the price of gasoline, which Kerry has made perhaps his single most prominent campaign issue. "George Bush has no plan, doesn't address it, doesn't seem to care that every American family is paying more to go to work, for the products that they get, to be able to get to school, to be able to do all the things Americans do in the course of a summer," Kerry charged last week in a typical broadside.

There are numerous flaws with Kerry's focus on gas prices. First, gas prices aren't actually that big a problem. Mathematically illiterate local news programs hype the fact that gas prices have topped the $2 mark for the first time ever. But, of course, the nature of inflation is such that, over time, the nominal cost of nearly everything tends to rise. Indeed, the average price of gas in the 1950s—an era many Americans remember as one of abundant, cheap energy—was about $1.80 per gallon in today's money; the U.S. record price for gasoline occurred in 1981, when regular unleaded cost about $2.80 per gallon in 2004 dollars. Kerry inadvertently confirmed the ho-hum nature of the current "gas crisis" when he declared last month, "Right now, there are people all over the country who are literally going through their purses and pockets—looking behind the sofa, under the cushions—to find the pennies and extra money to be able to pay the additional costs of gasoline." It seems not to have dawned on Kerry that, if gas prices (unlike, say, health care) are a problem that can be addressed by finding coins underneath cushions, then perhaps it's not actually a national emergency.

Second, while Kerry's near-obsessive invoking of gas prices seems aimed at conditioning voters to curse Bush's name every time they pull up to the pump, the rise in gasoline prices isn't really Bush's fault. The main cause is rising demand, especially in China and India. It's true that instability in Iraq has contributed somewhat to higher prices. But there would be uncertainty about Iraq's oil even if Bush had carried out the well-planned, multilateral occupation that Kerry says he would have executed.



Third, Kerry's proposed solutions to this "crisis" are either ineffectual or counterproductive. He has sensibly proposed incentives for more efficient cars, but that would do nothing to lower the short-term price hike he bemoans. He has also urged Bush to temporarily stop filling the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. (Of course, if Bush had done so, Kerry would have decried him for manipulating it in an election year for partisan purposes.) But, since gasoline supply is constrained more by refining capacity than by the amount of crude oil, this would have a negligible effect on prices. Finally, Kerry has demanded that Bush "jawbone" Saudi Arabia into increasing production. But, if Bush has political capital with the Gulf kingdom, wouldn't it be better spent persuading the Saudis to crack down on terrorists, rather than saving American drivers a few pennies?

Worst of all, Kerry is reinforcing America's debilitating belief that extremely cheap gas is both possible and desirable. It's not possible, because the rising price of gasoline is a function of a long-term rise in demand that's likely to continue. And, even if it were possible, it's not desirable, because cheap gas encourages drivers to buy ridiculously inefficient vehicles. One result is that we're more vulnerable to swings in oil prices and we send more of our national income to terrorism-supporting Gulf kingdoms than we would if even a modicum of sensible conservation prevailed.

The truth, as Kerry no doubt understands, is that a sensible energy policy would require Americans to pay *more* for gasoline. Demanding these sorts of sacrifices is not easy. Republicans flayed President Clinton in 1993 for imposing a piddling 4.3 cents per gallon tax increase. If Kerry truly intends to launch a national energy-independence campaign—and his record suggests a genuine commitment to the issue—then, sooner or later, he'll have to speak some hard truths to an American public that has grown accustomed to rumbling around in gas-guzzling behemoths. If that day comes, the populist flames he's fanning today will come back to burn him. ■

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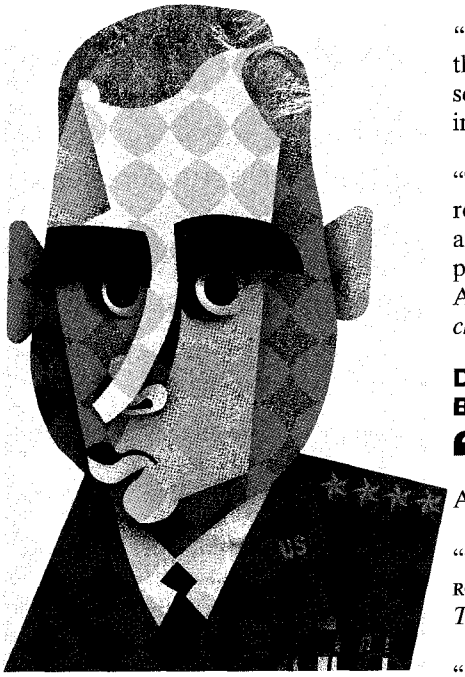
NOTEBOOK

GEORGE W. BUSH, BAD LISTENER . . . TRENT LOTT, QUITE SINISTER

FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

FOR MONTHS NOW, PRESIDENT George W. Bush has responded to calls that he send more troops to Iraq by saying that force levels are decided by the officers on the ground. Monday night's speech was no different: "General [John] Abizaid and other commanders in Iraq are constantly assessing the level of troops they need to fulfill the mission," he said. "If they need more troops, I will send them." And, on Sunday, when former Middle East commander General Anthony Zinni, whose own contingency plans for invading Iraq called for 300,000 soldiers, told "60 Minutes" that he thought we needed more troops, the White House's reply dripped with condescension: "Obviously, General Zinni, retired General Zinni, has every right to voice his opinion. But President Bush is gonna listen to the active commanders on the ground—General John Abizaid, General Rick Sanchez, and others who are actually on the scene and know exactly what needs to be done to be successful," White House Communications Director Dan Bartlett said.

But the president doesn't seem to be listening very closely. When Abizaid testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee last week, he dutifully said he had enough *combat* troops but then pointedly elaborated that he's short of practically everything else. "There are certain types of troops that we don't have enough of, and we still don't have enough of them, and we've got to figure out how to get them," Abizaid said. "And they're [military police], and they're [military intelligence] guys. . . . And they're civil affairs people." Of course, since combat troops have been filling the gap left by these troops, this was another way of saying Abizaid is short of forces, period. What's more, Abizaid pointed out that the security situation is likely to deteriorate after the June 30 handover of sovereignty, when an untested interim government will have to negotiate between the behind-the-scenes influence of the United States and the increasing anti-Americanism of the Iraqi people. "It could very well be more violent than we are seeing today," Abizaid said, "so it's possible that we might need more forces." One might think it prudent to send the forces that the combatant commander believes necessary *before* the expected deterioration of security. So, either the president should send more troops to Iraq or find a more honest explanation for why he won't. Or else he could stick to his platitudes and hope General Abizaid doesn't testify again anytime soon.



John Abizaid

ABU GHRAIB IDIOCY WATCH

"SOME OF THOSE PEOPLE SHOULD probably not be in prisons in the first place."—Senator Trent Lott, speaking on May 24 about the abuse at Abu Ghraib, implying that certain prisoners ought to have been killed on the battlefield

"Nothing wrong with holding a dog up there unless it ate him. [They just] scared him with the dog."—Lott, on intimidation at Abu Ghraib

"This is not Sunday school. This is interrogation. This is rough stuff."—Lott, after being reminded that at least one prisoner died as the result of abuse at Abu Ghraib. (Thanks to *thejacksonchannel.com*.)

DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU MEAN BY "MUCH PLAY"

"NERVE AGENT DETECTED IN SEPARATE INCIDENT"—headline, page A1, *The Washington Post*, May 18

"DEADLY NERVE AGENT SARIN IS FOUND IN ROADSIDE BOMB"—headline, page A14, *The Washington Post*, May 18

"American officials also announced that they had discovered an artillery shell in Baghdad several days ago loaded with the deadly nerve gas sarin. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld reacted cautiously to the discovery, saying more extensive tests were necessary."—from an article on page A1, *The New York Times*, May 18

"ARMY DISCOVERS OLD IRAQI SHELL HOLDING SARIN, ILLICIT WEAPON"—headline, page A11, *The New York Times*, May 18

"You probably missed the news because it didn't get much play, but a small, crude weapon of mass destruction may have been used by Saddam's terrorists in Iraq this week."—William Safire, *The New York Times*, May 19

THE ATTACHED ONE, WE HOPE

"I'M HONORED TO SHAKE THE HAND of a brave Iraqi citizen who had his hand cut off by Saddam Hussein."—President Bush, May 25

DAVID COWLES

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PATRIOT GAMES

A FEW WEEKS AGO IN THIS SPACE, we noted congressional Republicans' tendency to portray Democratic criticisms of the Bush administration's Iraq strategy as a kick in the collective gut of America's troops and even as a potential threat to their lives. Since then, it has only gotten worse. Republicans now freely portray their Democratic colleagues as something close to traitors. For instance, Representative J.D. Hayworth said on May 6, "I disagree in the strongest possible terms with those who attempt to politicize this conflict and, in essence, place in jeopardy our men and women in uniform." And, when Pennsylvania Democrat John Murtha recently declared the Iraq struggle to be "unwinnable" without a change of strategy, Republican Mark Foley publicly fumed that "disparaging what our soldiers are doing in Iraq is tantamount to giving comfort to the terrorists and comfort to the enemy." (Never mind that Murtha is a decorated veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars and presumably has more than sufficient empathy for our troops in the field.) But the standard for this thuggish rhetorical tactic was set last week by—who else?—House Majority Leader Tom DeLay after House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi called George W. Bush incompetent and said he had bungled the execution of the Iraq war. "Nancy Pelosi should apologize for her irresponsible, dangerous rhetoric," DeLay frothed in a statement. "She apparently is so caught up in partisan hatred for President Bush that her words are putting American lives at risk." DeLay might have a touch more credibility were he not among Washington's most famous partisan haters, but the question neither he nor any of his fellow patriots have answered is how, exactly, Capitol Hill sniping puts American lives at risk. Nor have they explained what they plan to do with the millions of traitors who criticize President Bush by voting in November—for John Kerry. ■

TNR.commentary

Campaign Journal

RYAN LIZZA

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP: Finally, some of those mysterious foreign leaders have stepped forward to publicly back John Kerry. Must be a couple of left-wing German parliamentarians, right? Actually, it's a spokesman for Great Britain's conservative Tory Party, Alan Duncan, and a Tory member of Parliament named Simon Burns. From the BBC, May 26:

> Mr. Duncan has said he feels that neoconservatives such as Defense Secretary Mr. Rumsfeld are making the world a "more dangerous place" because of the way they are dealing with the threat from international terrorism.
>
> Meanwhile, another Tory MP, Simon Burns, said he too supported Mr Kerry's bid to win power. "I am probably a bit of an aberration in the Conservative Party in that I have always identified with the Democrats, but there may be a shift of emphasis going on in our attitude to the current administration," he told the *London Times*. "I cannot believe myself and Alan are the only Tory MPs who [would] vote against Bush if we had the chance."

You can only imagine what the French must be thinking.

&c.

NOAM SCHEIBER

NOT QUITE COMING CLEAN: One of the more curious things about the president's speech Monday night was that he used it both to apologize for the torture at Abu Ghraib, which he promised to raze, and to reemphasize the fact that Iraq remains a crucial front in the war on terrorism. Here's what he had to say about the latter:

> Americans have seen the flames of September the 11, followed battles in the mountains of Afghanistan, and learned new terms like orange alert and ricin and dirty bomb. ...
>
> Our terrorist enemies have a vision that guides and explains all their varied acts of murder. They seek to impose Taliban-like rule, country by country, across the greater Middle East. ...
>
> Our actions, too, are guided by a vision.
>
> We believe that freedom can advance and change lives in the greater Middle East, as it has advanced and changed lives in Asia, in Latin America, in Eastern Europe, and Africa. We believe it is a tragedy of history that, in the Middle East, which gave the world great gifts of law and science and faith, so many have been held back by lawless tyranny and fanaticism. ...
>
> These two visions have now met in Iraq and are contending for the future of that country.

But these two things—the apology and the war-on-terrorism shtick—strike me as contradictory. For my money—and I'm not the first to point this out—the most important cause of the mess we created at Abu Ghraib was the administration's view of Iraq as a front in the war on terrorism, rather than as a conventional war with conventional prisoners of war, who would be treated according to, well, the Geneva Conventions. As an unnamed "government" (presumably Defense Department) consultant told Seymour Hersh in last week's *New Yorker*, "This [the interrogation techniques used at Abu Ghraib] was stupidity. ... You're taking a program that was operating in the chaos of Afghanistan against Al Qaeda, a stateless terror group, and bringing it into a structured, traditional war zone. Sooner or later, the commandos would bump into the legal and moral procedures of a conventional war with an Army of a hundred and thirty-five thousand soldiers."

Now, if you're convinced that Iraq is simply another front in the war on terrorism, then you're convinced that the people you capture there are terrorists, or at least associated with terrorists. Which means that you can't really feel too bad about what happened at Abu Ghraib, since we've been using some variant of our procedures there to deal with the Al Qaeda operatives we've picked up over the last few years. The only way what happened at Abu Ghraib would truly shock and outrage you is if you thought of Iraq as a conventional war rather than a part of the war on terrorism. Which is to say, at least one part of Bush's speech was deeply disingenuous.

DEPT. OF NOT REASSURING MILITARY LINGO: This, from a May 25 *New York Times* article, reporting still more grim news from Abu Ghraib:

> [A]n autopsy found that a detainee, Muhammad Najem Abed, died of cardiac arrest complicated by diabetes, without noting, as the investigation summary does, that he died after "a self-motivated hunger strike."

Self-motivated hunger strike? Sounds a little ominous, no? Would we have to identify the hunger strike as "self-motivated" if there weren't some other kind?

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The FBI silences dissenters. 'Nuff Said

BY CLAY RISEN

IN THE AFTERMATH of September 11, the FBI hired Sibel Edmonds—and hundreds of others who, like her, were fluent in Middle Eastern languages—to translate thousands of hours of backlogged wiretap transcripts and other documents. Edmonds didn't stay at the FBI for very long, though. In March 2002, after she complained to her supervisor about poor management, slow progress, and even a possible spy within the translators' department, she was fired. In response, Edmonds filed a wrongful termination suit, went on "60 Minutes," and even sat down with staffers for Senators Charles Grassley and Patrick Leahy, who have pushed the FBI to respond to her claims—a response that, two years later, has yet to arrive. Edmonds's case, Grassley charged last week in a Senate hearing with FBI Director Robert Mueller, is evidence that the Bureau is refusing "to face up to its problems with translation."

Last week, the Justice Department, which oversees the Bureau, finally took action—by announcing that all the information it had provided to Grassley and Leahy about Edmonds and her accusations, even seemingly mundane details, such as which languages she speaks, had been "reclassified." Copies of follow-up letters sent by Grassley and Leahy to the FBI have been removed from the senators' websites, and their staffs are now prevented from talking about what was, until last week, public knowledge. The Justice Department refuses to discuss the matter, even to verify that information has in fact been reclassified. "I think it's ludicrous, because I understand that almost all of this information is in the public domain and has been very widely available," Grassley said during last week's hearing. "This classification is very serious, because it seems like the FBI would be attempting to put a gag order on Congress."

Indeed, the Edmonds "reclassification" is only the latest attempt by the FBI to hide, rather than confront, its problems. "We worry that you have not solved some of your most basic problems," Leahy told Mueller last week. "Your information-technology systems are hopelessly out of date. The FBI is not much better off today than it was before 9/11." And, when people inside the Bureau try to point this out, they are routinely brushed aside: For months, the FBI ignored Coleen Rowley, a Minneapolis agent who claimed the Bureau had missed prior evidence of the September 11 plot. After John Roberts, a unit chief in the Bureau's Office of Professional Responsibility, discussed the FBI's shortcomings with "60 Minutes" in October 2002, he was verbally disciplined by his supervisor. And other whistleblowers have faced retaliation for discussing everything from lapses in the Oklahoma City bombing case to evidence theft by Bureau agents at Ground Zero. But the Edmonds case is the most ham-handed attempt to stifle damaging evidence so far—not only because reclassification of such publicly available information is next to impossible, but because the government violated its own rules in order to do it.

EDMONDS SAYS THAT a Turkish woman hired by the FBI as a translator, Can Dickerson, asked to translate all the documents pertaining to a particular foreign organization—the name of which has always been classified—that was under investigation by the FBI. According to Edmonds, Dickerson then tried to recruit her into that same organization. Edmonds says she reported Dickerson to her supervisor but was told to drop it. Soon after, the FBI terminated Edmonds's contract, citing "disruptiveness." Nevertheless, when Bureau officials sat down with Senate staffers a few months later, they verified most of Edmonds's claims—even though, according to a follow-up letter from Grassley and Leahy to the Bureau, "the FBI downplayed the importance of this matter."

So why, two years later, is the Bureau so eager to suppress information that it had previously said was unimportant? In his meeting with the Senate Judiciary Committee last week, Mueller asserted the "mosaic theory" of information, in which a piece of data is innocuous alone but, when combined with others, becomes potent. "There are other areas of information that have come out that, put together with that information, may bear on national security," he said.

But, even if Mueller is correct, what is the purpose of reclassifying information that everyone already knows? Most likely it is an attempt to suppress Edmonds's damaging claims against the Bureau. Although the Justice Department has sought to quash Edmonds's wrongful termination suit by invoking the State Secrets Privilege—a rarely used but powerful government tool that allows lawsuits to be dismissed if their continuation would severely damage the national interest—doing so only protects the government in the courts; it does nothing to prevent Congress or 9/11 Commissioners (who have taken closed-door testimony from Edmonds on the FBI's translation failures) from digging deeper. But, by reclassifying information pertaining to Edmonds, the Justice Department can hinder further congressional or public investigation. For instance, until last week, both Grassley and Leahy had been quite vocal in their aggressive criticism of the FBI's handling of the case; after the reclassification, the best they can do is send Mueller classified letters.

Indeed, the reclassification will take the Edmonds matter out of the public eye. "[Justice Department officials want to] keep it out of the press," says Steven Aftergood, an analyst with the Federation of American Scientists. "They [want to] make the whole controversy much more manageable." And, while the order might not prevent Edmonds from talking, it does stop others from supporting her claims.

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"It prevents the woman from being able to document what she's alleging," says John Prados, an analyst with the National Security Archive. "Absent this action, it's theoretically possible that a congressional staffer could come forward and support Sibel Edmonds's testimony." By isolating Edmonds, what was once a gathering controversy is reduced to a case of she-said, Bureau-said, making it much easier for the FBI to ignore the whole thing.

Even worse, the way the Justice Department reclassified the Edmonds information appears to have violated its own rules. According to William Leonard, director of the National Archives' Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO), a reclassification request for publicly available information requires the government to meet three standards: One, that the request is made by the head or deputy head of an agency; two, that the information being reclassified is reasonably recoverable; and three, that the office requesting reclassification inform Leonard and the ISOO, which must ensure that the first two standards have been met. In this instance, the Justice Department met only one of the three requirements for reclassification (the move was, at least, ordered by Attorney General John Ashcroft). It has so far failed to inform the ISOO; in fact, Leonard says the first he heard of the effort was in a *New York Times* article last week. "No agency has notified me that it has exercised a reclassification," he says. Moreover, even if it had tried (and it didn't), it's unlikely that Justice could prove to the ISOO that the information was recoverable: Despite being removed from the Senate websites, the Grassley-Leahy letters are still available online, either through Google caches, the Lexis-Nexis database, or websites that downloaded them when they were still available. "If it's on the Web," says Leonard, "it is not reasonably recoverable."

ULTIMATELY, SOME PEOPLE believe the Justice Department's reclassification of the Edmonds information could backfire. "It bolsters her credibility," says Aftergood. "If she were a crank making wild allegations about 9/11, she would be ignored. But, when the attorney general starts throwing his weight around to keep her quiet, you have to wonder what it is she knows." But others aren't so sanguine. "To me it's the typical response," says Louis Clark, president of the Government Accountability Project. "The response is to keep a lid on all the information that might be embarrassing to the FBI."

And, so far, no one has officially tried to lift that lid. Though he raised the topic with Mueller, Grassley readily complied with the reclassification order, as did Leahy. ISOO's Leonard says he has requested an explanation from Ashcroft but has yet to receive a response. Even more baffling in this era of September 11 investigations, only one newspaper, *The New York Times*, covered the decision. Indeed, the silencing of Edmonds has been remarkably silent. Which is probably just what the FBI was counting on in the first place. ■

Kill the insurgents. Stop Talking

BY VICTOR DAVIS HANSON

MOST OF THE time in war, diplomatic machinations don't create enduring realities—events on the battlefield do. After World War I, the defeated, but not humiliated, German army that surrendered in France and Belgium provided the origins for the "stab in the back" mythology that fueled Hitler's rise to power. After World War II, by contrast, the shattered and shamed Wehrmacht in Berlin was unable to energize a Fourth Reich. George S. Patton, snarling to head for Berlin and beyond in 1945, grasped the importance of "the unforgiving minute," when military audacity can establish a fait accompli on the ground that diplomats quibble over for decades. His unfulfilled wish to take Prague meant a blank check for a late-arriving Red Army that would help ensure a half-century of totalitarianism in Eastern Europe.

The labyrinth of failed plans and bad-faith deals in the Balkans led nowhere until the U.S. Air Force secured in 79 days in 1999 the capitulation of Slobodan Milosevic—the chief foreign policy achievement of the Clinton administration. Suicide bombing failed to bring Yasir Arafat what he could not obtain at Camp David only because of the skill and ingenuity of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), which—through a multifaceted strategy of border fortification, proactive attacks, targeted air assassinations, and increased intelligence and vigilance—drastically curtailed the efficacy of the tactic. Arafat today is a marginalized figure not because of a belated European perception that he is corrupt and murderous, but because he was first reduced to a humiliated lord of a rubble pile—thanks to the IDF.

In our current postmodern world, we tend to deprecate the efficacy of arms, trusting instead that wise and reasonable people can adjudicate the situation on the ground according to Enlightenment principles of diplomacy and reason. But thugs like Moqtada Al Sadr's Mahdi Army and Saddam Hussein's remnant killers beg to differ. They may eventually submit to a fair and honest brokered peace—but only when the alternative is an Abrams tank or Cobra gunship, rather than a stern rebuke from L. Paul Bremer. More important, neutrals and well-meaning moderates in Iraq often put their ideological preferences on hold as they wait to see who will, in fact, win. The promise of consensual government, gender equality, and the rule of law may indeed save the Iraqi people and improve our own security—but only

Victor Davis Hanson is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.

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when those who wish none of it learn that trying to stop it will get them killed.

A year ago, we waged a brilliant three-week campaign, then mysteriously forgot the source of our success. Military audacity, lethality, unpredictability, imperviousness to cheap criticism, and iron resolve, coupled with the message of freedom, convinced neutrals to join us and enemies not yet conquered to remain in the shadows. But our failure to shoot looters, to arrest early insurrectionists like Sadr, and to subdue cities like Tikrit or Falluja only earned us contempt—and not just from those who would kill us, but from others who would have joined us as well.

The misplaced restraint of the past year is not true morality, but a sort of weird immorality that seeks to avoid ethical censure in the short term—the ever-present, 24-hour pulpit of global television that inflates a half-dozen inadvertent civilian casualties into Dresden and Hiroshima. But, in the long term, such complacency has left more moderate Iraqis to be targeted by ever more emboldened murderers. For their part, American troops have discovered that they are safer on the assault when they can fire first and kill killers, rather than simply patrol and react, hoping their newly armored Humvees and fortified flak vests will deflect projectiles.

This is the context for the current insistence on more troops. America's failure to promptly retake Falluja or rid Najaf of militiamen demands more soldiers to garrison the ever more Fallujas and Najafs that will now surely arise. In contrast, audacity is a force multiplier. A Sadr in chains or in paradise is worth more, in terms of deterrence, than an entire infantry division.

There are other advantages to a force of some 138,000 rapidly responding soldiers, rather than 200,000 or so garrison troops. The more American troops, the less likely it is Iraqis will feel any obligation to step up to the responsibilities of their own defense. The more troops, the more psychological reliance on numbers than on performance of individual units. And, the more troops, the higher the profile of culturally bothersome Americans who disturb by their mere omnipresence, rather than win respect for their proven skill in arms.

ON MONDAY EVENING, the president outlined a sober, workable, step-by-step transition plan from the appointment of constitutional framers to representative delegates and on to direct democracy, which, like it or not, will at long last put a much-needed Iraqi face on both political and military operations. The long-term trends offer hope—whether we look at heightened petroleum revenue from increased pumping and prices to the influx of U.S. aid and the resurrection of the Iraqi infrastructure. But these trends won't endure unless our youth bring to bear the full force of U.S. military might that credits the Iraqis for their success in putting down the opponents of their own newly created society.

This formula does not require more American soldiers. It requires the increasing use of admittedly unreliable Iraqi troops made more reliable by the massive use of U.S. tanks, airpower, and artillery. The former will grow in confidence, as did the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, when they grasp that real force is on their side and that their enemies have no commensurate recourse to air strikes, armor, and heavy artillery—much less billions of dollars in aid. In other words, we can accomplish two seemingly mutually exclusive goals—more security and less of an American profile—but only by using the force we have to punish the enemy on every single occasion it attacks, starting immediately.

Practically, a new aggressiveness means greater use of Special Forces, Rangers, elite airborne units, and Marines to spearhead retaliatory raids in conjunction with Iraqi forces. Conventional and purely American units should form strategic reserves out of sight that can arrive in overwhelming force to surround recalcitrant cities should our Iraqi-American forces face problems—and they will, at first. Clear success in Falluja—defined not just by apparent tranquility, but the absence of arms caches, nocturnal assassins, and organized gangs of Baathists using homes and businesses to foment insurrection—will undermine Sadr's militias, embolden democracy-minded moderates, and frighten Iran and Syria into curbing their mischief. Iran will talk to us soon enough about behavior that promotes stability rather than terrorism—but only when they have real reason to fear U.S. success in Iraq. A consensual Iraq, then, even in the broadest sense, is a de facto revolutionary force in the region, whose daily televised parliamentary proceedings, free and open presses, economic transparency, and vibrant popular culture offer an alternative paradigm to the same old tired Middle East dichotomy between the Islamic fundamentalism of the masses and the fascist autocracy of the elite.

By contrast, hesitation and uncertainty would propel the sequence of events into reverse. If the humiliating withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975 helped create the landscape for the boat-people, reeducation camps, the Cambodian holocaust, the takeover of the Tehran Embassy, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Russian-sponsored insurrection in Central America, and a decade-long demoralization at home, so, in the same way, our momentum thus far has curtailed the Libyan weapons program, brought revelations of nuclear mischief from Dr. A.Q. Khan, and put Iran and Syria under scrutiny—a volcanic, not a static, situation that can as easily deteriorate as improve. The hard truth is that grand diplomacy and geopolitical calculus depend on the lethality of a few thousand American fighters in the streets of Karbala, Kufa, and Najaf. The more lethal they are today, the safer Iraqis and Americans will be in the years to come. ■

Class Action

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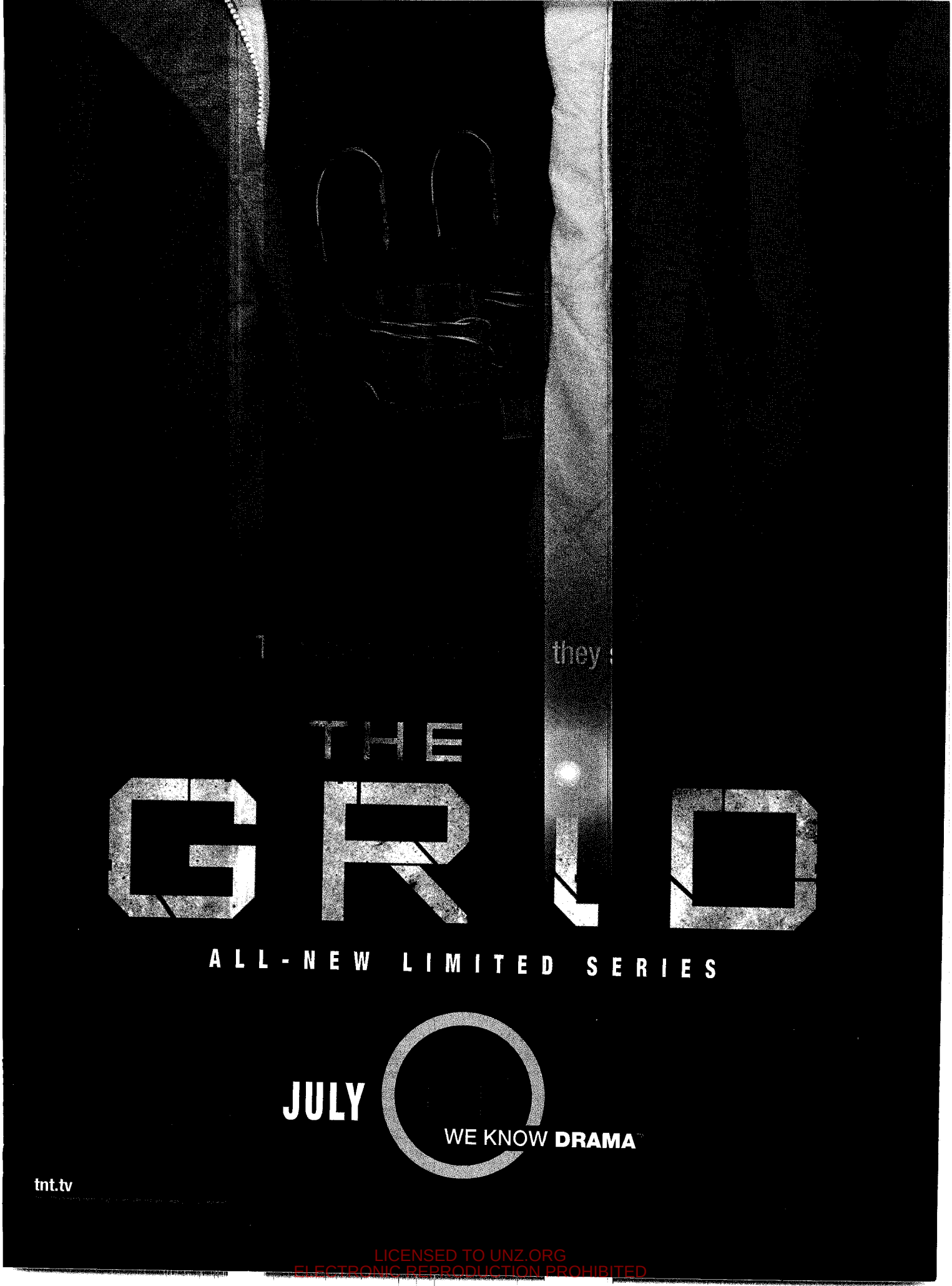

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Face reality.

Lowered Vision

BY ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

AMERICA'S IRAQ POLICY requires a fundamental strategic reappraisal. The present policy—justified by falsehoods, pursued with unilateral arrogance, blinded by self-delusion, and stained by sadistic excesses—cannot be corrected with a few hasty palliatives. The remedy must be international in character; political, rather than military, in substance; and regional, rather than simply Iraqi, in scope.

Rectifying the increasingly messy Iraqi adventure requires understanding its root: the extremist foreign policy pursued by this administration. Its rhetoric has been demagogic, especially at the very top. Its strategic content has been manipulated by officials preoccupied more with reshaping the security landscape of the Middle East than with maintaining America's ability to lead globally. Domestic support for its policies was mobilized by the deliberate exploitation, as well as stimulation, of fear among the electorate. The Iraq war is not only an outgrowth of this flawed approach to foreign policy, but also its symbol.

Unlike the 1991 war against Iraq, for which more than 80 percent of the cost was borne by America's allies, this time American taxpayers must foot the bill, which is already approaching $200 billion. The number of Americans dead and wounded is in the thousands and climbing, and the number of innocent Iraqis killed is considerably higher. America's relationship with Europe—which is integral to global stability and to the protection of U.S. interests—has been badly strained. America's credibility has been tarnished among its traditional friends, its prestige has plummeted worldwide, and global hostility toward the United States has reached a historical high.

Most immediately dangerous, the war has focused Arab hatred on the United States. The U.S. occupation of Iraq is now seen by most Arabs as a mirror image of Israel's repression of the Palestinians. The Bush administration's unqualified support for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's brutal treatment of the Palestinians has created a political linkage between the war in Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is evident to almost everyone in the world except the current White House.

The initiatives President Bush took this week point in the right direction, but they are too late in coming and involve too little change in substance. The president now accepts implicitly what top-level administration officials explicitly rejected when I spoke with them just a few months ago: the need for a U.N. umbrella over the U.S. grant of even limited sovereignty to the Iraqi government. The administration, however, still refuses to bite the bullet and make difficult decisions on the role and duration of the U.S. military presence in Iraq or on the larger dilemmas of regional peace in the Middle East.

The administration has yet to confront squarely the fact that the deteriorating situation both in Iraq and in the region will not improve without a politically comprehensive and coldly realistic revision of current policies that addresses four key points: (1) The transfer of "sovereignty" should increase, rather than discredit, the legitimacy of the emerging Iraqi government, and hence it should issue from the United Nations, not the United States; (2) Without a fixed and early date for U.S. troop withdrawal, the occupation will become an object of intensified Iraqi hostility; (3) The Iraqi government should reflect political reality, not doctrinaire American delusions; and (4) Without significant progress toward an Israeli-Palestinian peace, post-occupation Iraq will be both anti-American and anti-Israel.

FIRST, THE TRANSFER of nominal sovereignty to a few chosen Iraqis in a still-occupied country will brand any so-called "sovereign" Iraqi authority as treasonous. A grant of "sovereignty" by the United States to the Iraqis—while an American proconsul backed by an occupation army remains ensconced in a fortress in the very heart of the Iraqi capital—will have no political legitimacy. The president's assertion (repeated more than once in his speech on Monday night) that such a transfer will bestow "full sovereignty" on Iraq is Orwellian artifice.

The urgent need is to subordinate, as soon as possible, the U.S. occupation—which is rapidly alienating the Iraqis—to the visible presence of the United Nations, headed by a high commissioner to whom effective authority should then be transferred. A genuinely empowered U.N. high commissioner could, in turn, progressively yield genuine sovereignty to the Iraqis with much greater prospects of gaining Iraqi public support for the interim government.

The authority of any such high commissioner should extend to the security sphere. The American military commanders in Iraq should retain full discretion to respond to attacks upon U.S. forces in the manner they deem necessary, but any offensive operations they—or other coalition forces—conduct should require explicit authorization from the high commissioner, perhaps in consultation with the Iraqi leaders. That change in command and control would automatically transform the character of the U.S. presence in Iraq from a military occupation to internationally supervised peacekeeping. The U.N. resolution the Bush administration proposed Monday makes token gestures to that end, but it does not fundamentally alter the continued and overt supremacy of the United States in Iraq.

Zbigniew Brzezinski served as national security adviser to President Jimmy Carter and is the author of THE CHOICE: GLOBAL DOMINATION OR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP.

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SECOND, THE LONGER the U.S. military presence lasts, the more likely it is that Iraqi resistance will intensify. It is, therefore, in America's interest to credibly convey U.S. determination to let Iraqis manage (however imperfectly) their own security. Setting a reasonable deadline for the departure of U.S. troops—far enough in the future not to look like a pell-mell withdrawal but soon enough to concentrate Iraqi minds on the need for self-sufficiency—could take practical advantage of the fact that the countrywide situation on the ground is currently not quite as bad militarily as necessarily selective TV images suggest.

April 2005—two years after the occupation began—might be the appropriate target for terminating the U.S. military presence. A publicly known date for the departure of U.S. troops would refute suspicions that the United States harbors imperialist designs on Iraq and its oil, thereby diluting anti-American resentments both in Iraq and the region at large. Only a firm deadline for military withdrawal will convince the Iraqis that we truly intend to leave. Conversely, failure to set a date will encourage Iraqi politicians to compete in calling for early U.S. departure.

Admittedly, there is a risk that a U.S. withdrawal will be followed by intensified instability, but such instability would harm U.S. global interests less than continued (and perhaps rising) resistance to a seemingly indefinite U.S. occupation—which, in any case, has not suppressed low-level but widespread crime, violence, and terrorism. That resistance could take the form of intensified urban warfare, such as that waged five decades ago by the Algerians against the French. The United States could doubtless crush such an insurgency with an intensified military effort, but the political costs of such escalation—massive civilian casualties, pervasive destruction, and the inevitable exacerbation of national, cultural, and religious indignities—would be colossal.

The United States should consult with the principal members of its military coalition about an appropriate deadline. A set date of April 2005 could force other states, notably our European allies, to focus on the need for a wider and more ambitious effort to help the Iraqis stabilize and reconstruct their country. The militarily significant members of the coalition (those with 1,000 or more troops in Iraq) are Great Britain, Italy, Poland, Ukraine, and the Netherlands. Their views should be solicited, if for no other reason than because the publics in these countries are increasingly hostile to continued participation in Iraq's occupation, while some of the officers commanding their contingents in Iraq have been quite critical of heavy-handed U.S. military tactics.

THIRD, THE INTERNATIONALIZATION of the supreme political authority in Iraq and the setting of a date for U.S. withdrawal will require a redefinition of the oft-proclaimed (but largely illusory) goal of transforming Iraq into a democracy. Democracy cannot be implanted by foreign bayonets. It must be nurtured patiently, with respect for the political dignity of those involved. An assertive and occasionally trigger-happy occupation is no school of democracy. Humiliation and compulsion breed hatred, as the Israelis are learning in the course of their prolonged domination over the Palestinians.

Post-occupation Iraq will not be a democracy. The most that can be practically sought is a federal structure, based on traditional, often tribal, sources of authority within the three major communities that form the Iraqi state: the Shia, the Sunnis, and the Kurds. It would be unwise, however, to demarcate these communities into three territorially defined regions, for that would almost certainly produce intense border conflicts among them. Until the dust settles from Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and the U.S. military intervention, it would be wiser to rely on the traditional arrangements within the more numerous existing provinces—a strategy that could promote political compromise across sectarian lines. The result would likely be a somewhat Islamic Iraqi national government that roughly reflected the country's demographic, religious, and ethnic realities.

Iraq might become more dangerous if American troops withdrew, but the United States would be better off.

ANTONIO SCORZA/NEWSCOM

FOURTH, BUT FAR from least, the United States must recognize that success in Iraq depends on significant parallel progress toward peace between

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the Israelis and Palestinians. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the single most combustible and galvanizing issue in the Arab world. If the United States disengages from Iraq before making significant headway toward settling that dispute, it could face a sovereign Iraqi government that is militantly hostile to both Israel and the United States.

Therefore, the United States—if it is to gain any international (and especially European) support for remedying its Middle Eastern dilemmas—will have to clarify its stand on the eventual shape of an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement. It should by now be clear that the conflict will never be ended by the two parties on their own. U.S. unwillingness to define, even in broad terms, the fundamentals of a peaceful outcome abandons those Israelis and Palestinians who genuinely desire peace to the mercies of their extremist leaders. Furthermore, endorsing Ariel Sharon's goals but ignoring the Palestinian side of any compromise is delaying, rather than accelerating, the peace process—while compounding the suffering on both sides.

To mobilize those Israelis and Palestinians who seek peace, and to convince the Middle East that U.S. occupation of Iraq is not simply a conspiratorial extension of Israeli domination of the West Bank, the United States should more explicitly state its position regarding the six key issues that a final Israeli-Palestinian peace will have to resolve: not only (as Israel demands) that there can be no right of return for Palestinian refugees, and that the 1967 lines cannot automatically become the final frontier, but also that there will have to be equitable territorial compensation for any Israeli expansion into the West Bank; that settlements not proximate to the 1967 line will have to be vacated; that Jerusalem as a united city will have to be shared as two capitals; and that Palestine will be a demilitarized state, perhaps with some NATO military presence to enhance the durability of the peace settlement.

A fundamental course correction is urgently needed if the Middle East is to be transformed for the better. Slogans about "staying the course" are a prescription for inflaming the region while polarizing the United States and undermining U.S. global leadership. A bold change of course—given the gravity of the situation confronting the Iraqis, Israelis, and Arabs more generally, as well as concerned Europeans—could still snatch success from the tightening jaws of failure. But there is little time left. ■

Put Iraq to work.

Job Won

BY HASSAN FATTAH

OMAR KAMAL'S NISSAN stood out, even among the wrecks that litter Baghdad's streets. Green, with peeling paint, the eyesore could be spotted a mile away. Unfortunately, Kamal's car stood out to criminals as well. In March, somewhere between his home and his office, gunmen in a moving car opened fire on Kamal's vehicle, shooting him twice in the head.

An engineer by training, who exuded optimism about the future, Kamal embodied the promise of post–Saddam Hussein Iraq. He was educated, well-traveled, and generally happy about the overthrow of Saddam. A Sunni who had struggled to build a business under the former regime's rigid laws, Kamal was the kind of guy who, in a free Iraq, you'd expect to be running a major company one day or playing a central role in a rebuilt Iraqi civil society. But, two days after he was shot, his family buried him—and his dreams of a better life. It's not clear who shot him, but it may have been connected to Kamal's work with the foreign press as a translator, fixer, and office manager.

One year into the occupation, Iraq has descended into mob rule, and Iraqis like Kamal are its primary victims. The killing and burning of four foreign contractors in Falluja at the end of March was only the most extreme example of the violence Iraqis themselves face daily. In the two weeks before the Falluja murders, at least ten Iraqis working with the foreign media—including Omar Kamal—were shot and killed, sometimes in front of their families. Hundreds of others have been killed for assisting the occupation forces. I myself, editing a prominent newspaper in Baghdad and working for foreign magazines, was forced to leave Iraq after an armed man showed up at my house on the same day Kamal was shot. Almost a year after coming to my ancestral home to help build its civil society, I, too, had become a target of the mob.

The rise of the mob does not—contrary to much Western opinion—augur civil war. In no small irony, each new terrorist killing has actually united Iraqis. The country did not descend into ethnic conflict after the assassination of Shia leader Mohammed Bakr Al Hakim, possibly by Sunni extremists, last August. And subsequent attacks have only hardened Iraqi opposition to internal strife. Shia and Sunnis don't blame each other for the rising violence—they blame the United States, which many Iraqis hold liable for the infiltration of foreign terrorists before and after the war. In fact, Iraqis went out of their way to show their unity before and after a series of terrorist attacks in March against Shia worshippers during the Muslim holiday of Ashura, uniting in street demonstrations. And, as fighting in Falluja flared last month, Shia leaders delivered convoys of supplies and, according to the coalition, arms to Sunni fighters battling the United States.

Amid the chaos, Iraqis are united, nationalistic, and

Hassan Fattah, a frequent TNR *contributor, is the former editor of* IRAQ TODAY, *a leading English-language publication based in Baghdad.*

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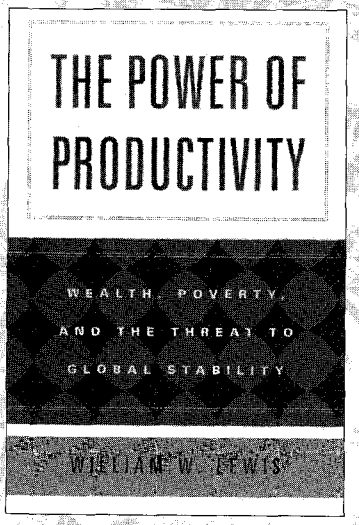

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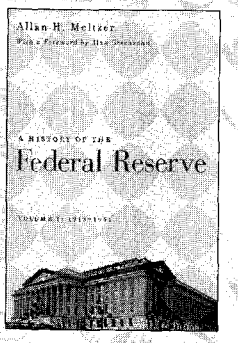

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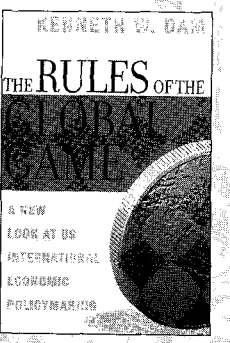

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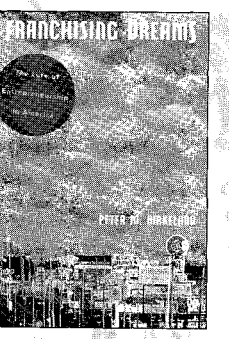

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strangely hopeful. In a recent *USA Today*/CNN/Gallup poll, 71 percent of respondents called the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) "occupiers." Yet, nearly two-thirds said they expect Iraq to be better off in five years. Eighty-four percent said Iraq needs a democratically elected government. And the cornerstones of security in a future Iraq—the Iraqi police, the new Iraqi army, and Iraqi governmental institutions—were viewed favorably by a majority of the population.

A nation is taking shape. As the June 30 handover of sovereignty to an Iraqi government approaches, Iraqis are saying that they will no longer rely on Americans to give them their rights; they will, however, demand that an Iraqi government do so. According to the poll, they want that government to be democratic, relatively liberal, and relatively free of religious control.

IRAQIS, IN OTHER words, are the solution. They can succeed—but only if the United States stops being the problem. The blunt reality is that, given the CPA's disastrous policies and America's horrible reputation in the region, nothing the United States does now can win Iraqi hearts and minds. As much as neoconservatives might wish to deny it, the United Nations possesses a legitimacy in the Iraqi psyche that the United States does not. In the Gallup poll, half of all Iraqis had a favorable or neutral impression of the United Nations. (By comparison, a majority had an *unfavorable* impression of the United States.) The oil-for-food scandal has barely registered among average Iraqis, with many dismissing it as a symptom of Saddam's corruption and not of U.N. corruption. Far more important is that, to many Iraqis, the United Nations represents the world—a world they want to rejoin. If Washington gives the United Nations full authority over the political transition and subsequent elections, Iraqis will be more likely to play along.

In turn, the coalition, along with the United Nations, must play to Iraqis' rising nationalism by more vocally defending Iraq's interests in the international community. Last summer, in a public statement, occupation head L. Paul Bremer demanded that Iraq's neighbors return important assets, including airplanes and vehicles, captured in wars. The move proved so popular that rumors began circulating that Bremer was muscling neighboring countries to solve intractable border problems. The rumors were untrue, but they underscored Iraqis' desperate hope that someone look out for them abroad. Few such rumors have circulated since, as top coalition officials have not made many similar public statements. As June 30 approaches, Bremer and his aides must be as public as possible in their lobbying for Iraqi interests, especially in regard to Iraq's crippling war debts and its reconstruction. As fear grows that donor nations that pledged reconstruction dollars for Iraq last October will not meet their commitments, Bremer must ensure that all such pledges are delivered. Doing so publicly might convince at least some Iraqis that the occupation has their best interests at heart.

WHILE HANDING OVER political authority to the United Nations, the United States will, for the time being, remain Iraq's primary military power. The paradox is that, to retain that power, the U.S. military must stop using force against the Iraqi insurgency.

One common American misconception is that Iraqis only respect force. In fact, Iraqis respect those who command authority rather than those who are violent. Slap someone and he will grow infuriated; speak to him firmly and he will listen to you. One of my reporters witnessed U.S. raids in his village that left several dead; his initial impulse was for revenge. When he confronted Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez over the killings at a press conference, he was struck by the general's forceful willingness to investigate and redress the events. The reporter soon became a conduit for his community to help ease relations with the U.S.-led occupation.

Nothing is more damaging to a successful, peaceful handover of power than the sight of U.S. tanks and soldiers fighting amid cities and urban areas, often killing more civilians than rebels. To avoid this, American soldiers in Iraq must, whenever possible, use nonlethal weapons. Tear gas and water cannons, both of which are frequently used by civilian police forces to control crowds, should become more common. Both would reduce the almost nightly televised images of Iraqis shot by Americans. If kill rates dropped with better crowd control, the United States would have fewer allegations of unlawful killings to contend with and might break the cycle of violence and counterviolence in both the Sunni center and the Shia south.

JUST AS THE United States must do a better job politically, it must do better economically, too. Many Iraqis cite a story that has been part of local lore since the 1920s. In a 1920 meeting between Gertrude Bell, the British equivalent of Bremer, and prominent tribal leader Haji Naji, Naji graphically illustrated Iraq's bubbling ethnic strife. With Bell at his side, Naji freed his flock of chickens from their cages and allowed them to run amok. "This is what happens when the people are hungry," Naji purportedly said. Then he ordered one of his servants to throw out seeds for the chickens to eat, and suddenly the chickens went quiet, pecking at the ground. "You see," Naji told Bell, "if you feed the people, they will cooperate."

Naji's lesson has never been more relevant. During the Great Depression, unemployment in the United States was some 25 percent; in Iraq today, the figure reaches 50 percent in some towns. With the economy struggling, and millions of Iraqis with little to do but curse the occupation that helped put them in this position, people are becoming ever more tempted to join the resistance. Washington has tried to rebuild the economy by relying largely on specialist contractors who have specific skills but who are not getting enough money into the hands of entrepreneurial Iraqis.

Instead, the CPA needs to launch massive, New Deal–

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style programs that would employ hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, put money in average people's hands, and jumpstart the economy. Besides providing work, these programs, as they did during the Great Depression, would help mold a new Iraqi identity. Iraq is ripe for just such a project. Last year, for example, the CPA instituted a Baghdad city cleanup that put thousands of Iraqis to work sweeping and unclogging drains. Baghdad became cleaner, and the notable quiet during and after the program underscored its success as Iraqis welcomed the massive public works effort.

In addition to repairing roads and sewers, the United States should put thousands of Iraqis to work conducting a census. As various political parties discuss their constituencies and economists make plans for the country, no one has any evidence of whom politicians represent or of where Iraqis live. Iraq has long had a tradition of community representatives in each neighborhood who are responsible for local information. Each community representative typically has the name of each family in the neighborhood; today, they could serve their communities by helping develop this census. As with the Baghdad cleanup, a census would help the economy and also build political unity—all of which would keep people from reaching for their guns.

THESE IDEAS FOR restoring stability and transferring sovereignty would likely cost the United States much less than the current budget-busting military campaign in Iraq. Yet they would deliver more impressive long-term results. For all America's guns, the occupation has yet to win the confidence of average Iraqi women and men, the people best able to stand up to the troublemakers and create peace and development. The mob, seizing on U.S. failures, is gaining strength. To defeat it, the United States has to place its resources—and its trust—in people like Omar Kamal. ■

Bring in the world.
Key to Success

BY WESLEY K. CLARK

IN MARCH 2003, Americans thrilled to televised scenes of U.S. forces moving into Iraq. Well-spoken soldiers, modern equipment, and embedded reporters suggested a sense of purpose, competence, and courage that resonated across the country. But today, 14 months later, the mission is in shambles, scarred by rising Iraqi popular discontent, continued attacks against U.S. forces, infiltration of foreign fighters, mounting civil strife, and no credible sense of direction.

Despite President George W. Bush's calls for staying the course, American public opinion has clearly turned against the mission. Some have already pronounced it a failure. Others, giving up on the idea of a unified Iraq, are seeking to salvage some measure of success by suggesting we break up the country, a proposal that would implicitly reward the Kurds—and invite more trouble later. Still others suggest that we reduce our ultimate objective from Iraqi democracy to Iraqi stability. All the critics warn that, if we don't change direction, we are headed for failure.

They're right: Absent significant changes, we *are* headed for failure. But the problem is not just that our goal of an American-style democracy is too ambitious; it's also that we've lacked the resources to meet it. Constructing a stable, representative government in Iraq is possible, provided we alter our strategy and tactics. To date, we have relied too heavily on our military to conduct tasks for which it is neither culturally prepared nor well-trained. While our troops should help secure the borders and handle internal threats that are too large for the still-nascent Iraqi forces, they should, as soon as possible, stop policing the country for one simple reason: They're not very good at it. Instead, we need to involve Middle Eastern countries and the larger international community in building a unified Iraq with a representative government that doesn't threaten its neighbors or serve as a magnet for Al Qaeda recruiting and that exerts enough control to ensure domestic stability and promote economic development.

FIRST, THE UNITED STATES must correct the "dynamic of conflict" that it has injected into the region. In essence, the Bush administration has scared Iran and Syria into believing that, if the United States is successful in its occupation of Iraq, they will be the next targets. To the Iranians and Syrians, the implication is that their survival depends on dragging the U.S. mission in Iraq into failure. Furthermore, America's perceived pro-Israel bias, and its failure to engage seriously in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has fed the poisonous atmosphere fueling Arab anger toward the United States and its efforts in Iraq.

To clear the air, the United States must first involve regional governments in Iraq's reconstruction, giving them a seat at the table in that country's development so they understand that they are not the next targets of regime change. The United States must also actively push the Middle East road map, with its goal of a two-state solution. The Bush administration cannot simply articulate a plan and expect the Israelis and Palestinians to follow—that clearly has not worked. Instead, it must hold serious and sustained dialogue between the two sides and among the so-called front-line states to hammer out details of a peace process. The road to Baghdad runs through Jerusalem, not, as the neoconservatives unquestioningly believe, the other way around.

Wesley K. Clark, a retired Army general, was Supreme Allied Commander, Europe from 1997 to 2000.

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Thus far, the Bush administration has been unable to win much backing from European and Middle Eastern states, but addressing fears of U.S. hegemony and spurring the Israeli-Palestinian peace process will help dispel Arab anger and enhance U.S. credibility in the region and abroad, allowing Washington to build an international advisory and support structure that will sustain the mission in Iraq after the Iraqis regain sovereignty on June 30. This structure should be a tailor-made international organization, such as the one created to implement the Dayton Accords in Bosnia in 1995. Call it the Iraqi Development Committee. Endorsed by the United Nations, such a committee would give a decision-making role to every nation that is contributing to Iraq's political, economic, or security development. The committee would appoint a high representative to lead advisory and assistance efforts on the ground in Iraq—not an American but, rather, someone from the region or perhaps Europe—thereby establishing an alternative power center to soon-to-be Ambassador John Negroponte to which the Iraqis can appeal. Sharing decision-making power and appointing a non-American to such a significant position will make it possible to attract substantial support—troops, economic assistance, et cetera—from our major allies.

The Committee should have an executive board comprising all the states bordering Iraq, including a representative from the Gulf Cooperation Council and, of course, one from the United States. It is this body, which would direct the aid its members provide, that would reassure Arab states of America's intentions. Such a committee would also provide the opportunity for face-to-face dialogue among Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United States, with the intention of promoting regional stability so Iraqi democracy can more easily flourish. Of course, the United States will likely differ sharply with the positions some of these states take, but it is better to hash out such issues at the negotiating table than in vitriolic exchanges via the media.

WITH THE COOPERATION of the international community—and the increased resources that come with it—we will be better able to help create a representative Iraqi government. Some have argued that, with its religious and ethnic divisions, the breakup of Iraq into Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish states is inevitable. But it's not, and we should do our best to keep the country together. Deliberately breaking up states has proved messy and violent in the past and is likely to provoke, rather than resolve, internal conflict. In Iraq, ethnic cleansing would be inevitable as Kurds, Sunnis, and Shia sought redress for past grievances (such as the seizure of Kurdish lands by Saddam Hussein's government) or acted violently out of fear that they must strike first before they become targets themselves. The regional consequences of such strife are unpredictable but could well be highly dangerous. Turkey and Iran could intervene in Iraq to prevent the establishment of a Kurdish state that could incite their own Kurdish populations to demand independence. Similarly, Syria's Kurds could well challenge President Bashar Al Assad's government, potentially sparking a civil war. All this instability would leave ample room for international terrorists to gather and wreak havoc.

To keep Iraq intact, the international community must dissuade it from founding a government chosen by proportional representation, in which Iraqis vote for an ethnically or religiously based party—an approach that has caused so much friction in the Balkans. Instead, we must encourage the Iraqis to adopt a representative system that brings people together, strengthening their common interests rather than highlighting their differences. A bicameral national structure to which voters elect individual politicians to represent their constituencies might force parties to move toward the political center rather than the extremes. Those constituencies could simply succeed Iraq's 18 governorates, whose borders are not drawn along sectarian lines.

While we can encourage Iraqis to avoid a state based on ethnic identity, denying them a theocratic state will be more difficult; Iraqis themselves must determine the relationship between Islam and human rights, particularly the rights of women. An Iraqi democracy will not look the same as an American democracy—and we cannot expect or force it to. Of course, we will encourage Iraq to adhere to international human rights standards, but, in the end, the Iraqis will have to choose for themselves laws and norms that reflect their morals and culture. Values cannot be imposed from the top down.

For Iraq to establish a representative government that can make such decisions, however, the international community will need to assist by deploying hundreds of skilled administrators, lawyers, jurists, and political scientists. Resources should also be provided for Iraqi delegations to visit other countries as a way of examining alternative legal and political arrangements. Indeed, the international community can make its greatest contribution in Iraq by helping to establish the rule of law. The near-term threat in Iraq is that the country could lapse into civil war or decay into seething instability, as Lebanon did in the 1970s. Either way, Iraq would likely become a haven for every form of illegal activity as well as a major recruiting and training ground for international terrorists. Maintaining internal stability consistent with representative government is a matter not only of effective policing, but also of a criminal justice system complete with laws, courts, judges, and civil and criminal punishments. The international community should help draft laws and procedures, train judges as well as police, and equip investigators, patrol officers, police headquarters, courts, and jails—a process that will take two or three years and cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Our experience in the Balkans will prove valuable here, but it will take U.S. leadership to extract and implement the lessons of that conflict.

The Iraqi government will also need help building a military strong enough to secure the country's borders, defeat

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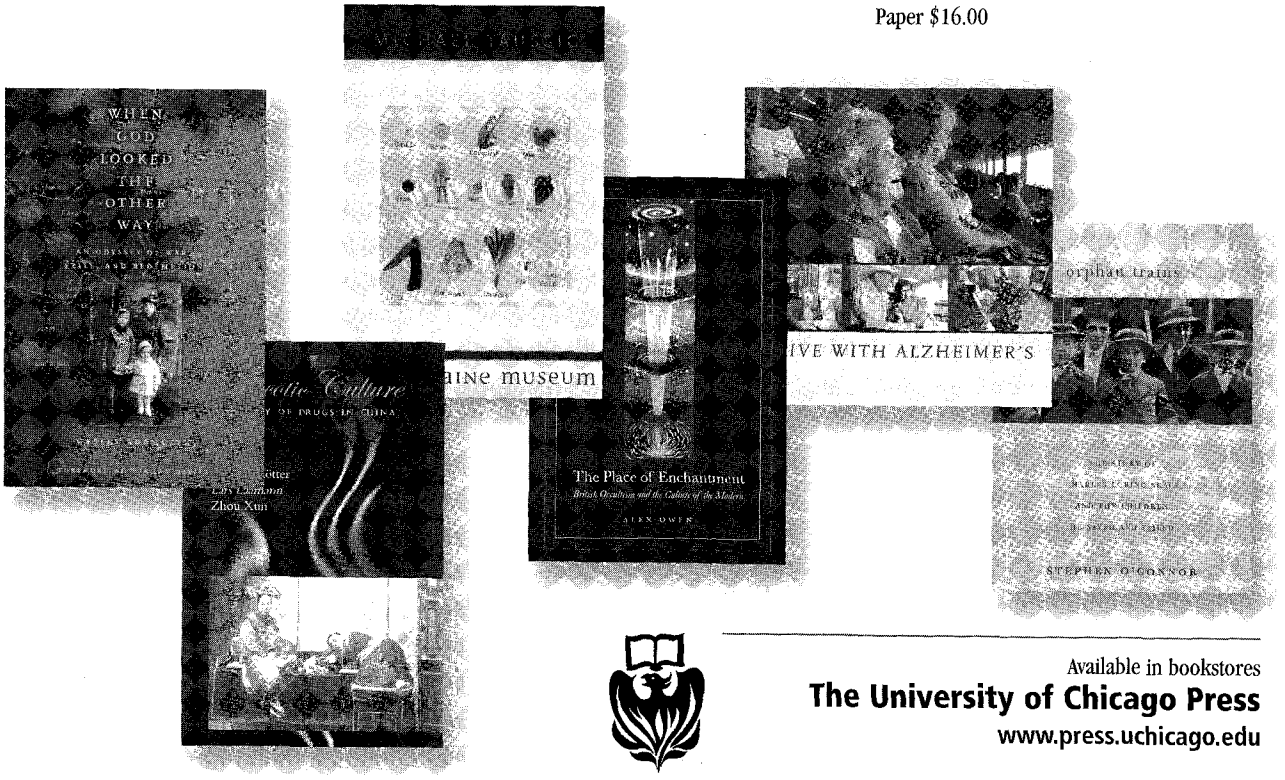

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any local, unauthorized militia, and enforce the rule of law—a process that could also take several years and cost hundreds of millions of dollars (though the Iraqis should be able to bear some of the costs themselves). In the interim, a substantial number of American troops will need to remain in the country, with U.N. and Iraqi authorization and a clear definition of their specific mission and responsibilities. To further encourage international contributions to Iraq, we should have our commanders report through NATO, while of course retaining authority to act in our own self-defense.

We must not, however, allow the violence in Iraq to serve as an excuse for inaction by the international community or to prevent us from delivering the development assistance we have promised. To do so would simply shift the entire burden of rebuilding Iraq to the U.S. military, which cannot solve the country's problems on its own. Indeed, helping Iraqis to rebuild their country will significantly enhance their ability to control and restrain the violence that has become increasingly prevalent.

The United States has taken some steps to promote Iraqi self-sufficiency, but they've been wobbly ones. We've tried to train police, but, in rushing the process, we've done a poor job. The last thing we want to do in Iraq is stay the course. We must make a substantial course correction—immediately. What is ultimately at risk in Iraq is not just the future of the Iraqi people, but regional stability in the Middle East and U.S. influence and security itself. Intervening in Iraq a year ago was optional—and, in my view, unnecessary. But we now have no choice about whether to succeed: We must. ■

Trust the Iraqis.

Silent Majority

BY MICHAEL RUBIN

LAST AUGUST, I participated in a town-hall meeting hosted by the administrative council of Dibis, an ethnically mixed town 22 miles northwest of Kirkuk. Locals complained about everything from sporadic electricity to fertilizer shortages to potholes, and their Iraqi representatives listened attentively. It was an encouraging sight, all the more so because the month before, Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) head L. Paul Bremer had proudly announced, in a televised speech, that "all of Iraq's main cities, and dozens of other towns, now have administrative councils."

But there was a problem. Soon after his announcement, Bremer—not wanting to complicate planning for the Iraq donor's conference to be held in Madrid in October—refused to give the councils budgetary authority. As a result, council members in places like Dibis could listen to complaints but lacked the means to respond to them. Iraqis quickly decided that their local representatives were little more than props.

In many other areas, the story has been the same. Iraqi farmers missed this year's planting season because the CPA's senior American adviser for agriculture (later fired) repeatedly refused the Iraqi minister of agriculture's request to order fertilizer. Despite problems restoring Iraq's electrical infrastructure, CPA electricity advisers never bothered to consult Saad Shakir Tawfiq, who oversaw its reconstruction after the Gulf war in 1991.

In fact, they didn't even return Tawfiq's calls, a tiny example of the paternalism that has characterized the American occupiers' treatment of the Iraqi people. Iraqis, contrary to what many in Washington now believe, were not anti-American from the beginning. Many troops *were* greeted as liberators. *The Boston Globe* reported, the day after the fall of Baghdad, that "[j]ubilant Iraqis greeted US troops with cheers, victory signs, and flowers." Many are anti-American today because the United States has refused, in ways big and small, to give them real control over the country. Unless that changes, the June 30 handover will be a fiasco and a farce.

THE PATERNALISM BEGAN even before the war did. Fearing it could undermine prewar diplomacy, the State Department resisted efforts to create a "Free Iraqi Force" of exiles committed to fighting Saddam Hussein. On the first night of the war, the Free Iraqi Force huddled around radios at the Taszar Air Base in Hungary, 1,600 miles away from the country they were supposed to help liberate. The United States paid a price. Iraqi cheers turned to stunned silence when, on April 9, 2003, Corporal Edward Chin draped an American rather than an Iraqi flag over the face of Saddam's statue in Baghdad. The person climbing the statue should not have been an American carrying an Iraqi flag, but an Iraqi. Unfortunately, the forces most likely to have realized this were left cooling their heels in Central Europe.

Occupation brought more of the same. Heeding Iraqis' pleas, the United States formed the Iraqi Governing Council in July 2003. Unfortunately, Bremer soon dashed Iraqi hopes by proclaiming his veto power. "At the bottom, the [Coalition Provisional] Authority still has the ultimate authority here until we have a government in place," Bremer said five days before the Council's inauguration. As created, the Council presidency rotates each month, and no one leader gained the kind of longer-term power needed to negotiate with the CPA. When the Council tried to elect a prime minister, Bremer refused, saying it might undercut his own authority. Even the symbolism has been paternalis-

Michael Rubin, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, served as a Coalition Provisional Authority political adviser between July 2003 and March 2004.

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tic. Rather than use Governing Council members to deliver weekly radio addresses, Bremer delivered them himself, and the CPA's "Strategic Communication's Office" focused more on outreach to *The New York Times* than to Iraqis. Many Iraqis are upset that, more than a year after Saddam's overthrow, they still see CPA spokesman Dan Senor and General Mark Kimmitt, rather than an Iraqi, delivering the daily briefing to reporters.

In the U.S. press, the CPA is often portrayed as a force for liberalism, battling Iraqis' instinct for theocracy. But, in truth, liberal Iraqis have been given no more authority than their conservative countrymen. Kanan Makiya, one of Iraq's leading liberal intellectuals, spent the year following Saddam's overthrow developing the Iraq Memory Foundation, a museum that would commemorate the victims of Baathist tyranny and allow Iraqis to reflect on their history. Makiya's team catalogued documents and applied for CPA permits to build a museum accessible to all Iraqis. But, on April 23, 2004, with the stroke of a pen, Bremer undercut Makiya and established his own National Commission for Remembrance. Similarly, when Dr. Raja Al Khuzai, a liberal Shia member of the Governing Council, voiced concerns in a Council meeting in February 2004 about some of her colleagues' endorsement of Islamic law, one of Bremer's assistants chided her for risking an impasse in the drafting of the Transitional Administrative Law, which the United States needed to pass quickly. And, last week, U.S. forces raided the home of Council member Ahmed Chalabi, undermining the authority of the Council itself. "This is an insult," said Council President Ghazi Al Yawar. "It could happen to any Governing Council member."

There is a future for Iraqis—but they have to determine it themselves.

SABAH ARAR/NEWSCOM

FOR THE JUNE 30 handover of sovereignty to succeed, the United States must finally get serious about Iraqification. The White House proposes handing over control of Iraqi ministries to Iraqis, putting Iraqis in charge of crucial tasks like the rebuilding of infrastructure and the restoration of the energy sector. It also plans to replace Bremer with an American ambassador, John Negroponte, whom it says will be an adviser, not a proconsul. And it pledges national elections in 2005.

But this doesn't go far enough. To make the sure the CPA doesn't morph into a 3,000-person super-embassy, the United States should abandon most of the four-square-mile Green Zone, which it has, so far, not committed to closing. The bridge and road closures resulting from the U.S. cantonment in Baghdad's center are a constant irritant for Iraqis. Driving from Baghdad's Mansour district to its Karrada district took ten minutes before the toppling of Saddam; now it takes an hour. Once sovereignty is transferred, not a single American should remain inside Saddam's Republican Palace. The U.S.-run Convention Center can suffice.

And Washington must not only give Iraqis power; it must give them the resources to utilize that power, even if it disagrees with some of the choices Baghdad makes. The White House plans to hand control of ministries to Iraqis, but it must also allow Iraqis, and not American "technical advisers," to control the ministries' budgets. The administration has vowed to ensure that international donors fulfill their commitments to Iraq but appears unwilling to allow the Iraqi government to determine where the aid flows. The United States has expressed outrage at the U.N. oil-for-food scandal but has tried to defund the Governing Council's own examination of the problem so as not to make things awkward for U.N. envoy Lakhdar Brahimi. If the United States thinks Iraqis will take more kindly to U.N. paternalism than American paternalism, they are mistaken. Many Shia and Kurds remember that Brahimi remained silent when, as undersecretary of the Arab League between 1984 and 1991, Saddam massacred tens of thousands of Shia and Kurds. And Iraqis have not forgotten U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's February 24, 1998, comment, "Can I trust Saddam Hussein? I think I can do business with him." Iraqis, like most other peoples, are prickly nationalists. After the handover, the Iraqi government must be able to conduct its own sovereign investigation of the United Nations and anyone else. For Iraq to become a stable, peaceful democracy, power must reside with people like Saad Shakir Tawfiq. With a little luck, they'll take our calls. ■

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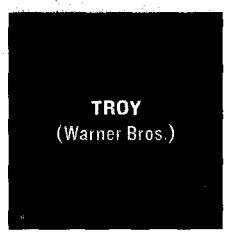
BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

War Time

VACHEL LINDSAY, THE POET who was for a time the film critic of THE NEW REPUBLIC, published a book in 1915 called *The Art of the Moving Picture*, a pioneer work in the field. In one of its many comprehensions, he said: "The supreme photoplay will give us things that have been but half expressed in all other mediums allied to it." I thought of Lindsay while I was watching **TROY**, the latest in a very long line of films made to give us those things that other mediums could not provide. Was *Troy* made primarily for the account of Paris's seduction of Helen or Achilles sulking in his tent or Priam's pride in his sons? They are all in the picture, of course, along with other stories, but they are like the patches of dialogue in a musical. The real purpose of the musical is the material that surrounds the dialogue: *Troy* was made for the spectacle that surrounds its stories.



That spectacle is almost entirely about armies and navies and immense battles and magnificent duels and the nobility of warriors. What this emphasis implies, quite markedly, is that several years ago the makers of this film—a very expensive one—were convinced that the world was ready for a celebration of war: war not merely as a subject but as an achievement. Obviously this is a return to classic themes. Much of the world's great drama and fiction celebrates these themes. (When the traveling players arrive at Elsinore, the sample of their work that they give Hamlet is about the Greek conquest of Troy. After Hamlet's death, Fortinbras commands that the prince who is so generally considered a poet-philosopher be regarded otherwise: "Let four captains/Bear Hamlet, like a soldier to the stage.... The soldiers' music, and the rites of war/Speak loudly for him.") Nonetheless, the decision to make *Troy* was, I'd say, less an urge toward classicism than a conviction that war—war presented as the optimum occupation of mankind—would sell.

The film opens with the seduction of Helen, wife of the Greek king Menelaus, by Paris, prince of Troy. Then comes the pursuit of Paris and Helen by Greeks and then the Trojan War. David Benioff, a novelist, based his screenplay on *The Iliad*, though he managed to compress the ten-year siege of Troy into twelve days or so. He gathers up bits of the epic as he moves along but is schizoid about the two most famous metaphors in the tale: Achilles's heel is skimped, while the Trojan horse, impressively designed by Nigel Phelps, serves its ominous purpose very well.

The director was Wolfgang Petersen, German-born, probably best known for *Das Boot*, about a German submarine in World War II, and *In the Line of Fire*, with Clint Eastwood as a presidential guard. Little in Petersen's past work promised the sweep that propels *Troy*: his film heaves, rolls on and up, and crashes like a giant breaker. He has also done his best—not always aided by Benioff's dialogue—to lift his characters to the classical without making them remote.

The one utter failure in this regard is Diane Kruger as Helen, marvelously lovely. They might as well have used a mannequin in the role. The only near-risible moments in the film come when Petersen inserts, into the battle scenes of the war being fought over Helen, quick close-ups of her oh-so-troubled face. The most venturesome casting was of Brad Pitt as Achilles. Although Pitt is asked to pose a good deal in statuesque splendor, he really strives to give the role stature. Despite the flowing film-star golden locks, he performs with thought and fire. The depth of his acting is at least equal to the depth of the writing. (At the end Achilles proclaims that his death doesn't matter: his name will be immortal. Doubtless he would be glad to know that he and many other characters in this story are in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*.)

Troy itself is made all the more remarkable because every woman prominent in the film is gorgeous. What a city that must have been. Among the men, notable performances come from Brian Cox as Menelaus, solid and heroic yet sly, and Peter O'Toole as Priam. It is unavoidably sad even to praise O'Toole in the role—not just because he is aging or because he has a secondary role with a few good scenes, but because he was the protagonist of the most intelligent film epic ever made. *Lawrence of Arabia* (another celebration of war) brought us an actor who showed every promise of true greatness; but great talent, as with John Barrymore and Richard Burton, isn't always matched by great strength of character. And here is O'Toole, adequate, not great.

Lawrence is an epic film that one can see again, as I have done several times, because all its elements—spectacle, acting, writing—are in balance. That balance certainly isn't in *Troy*. Admittedly, Petersen's film is in some ways better than expected, in its basic reasons for existence. Call them the Lindsay reasons. The thousand ships that Helen's face launched, the flowing armies advancing toward each other on immense fields, realize the magnitude that is the film's signet. And they are what we are there for. Digital effects have, I suppose, helped the film's scope: digitalization apparently relates to spectacle-makers as silicone does to strippers. But Petersen maneuvers his cataclysms with all the aplomb of Zeus.

His film made me remember the history of the struggle for mobility and size in the nineteenth-century theater. A book called *Stage to Screen* by A. Nicholas Vardac recounts the devices and strategies that were contrived then to overcome the physical limitations of theater production. Whenever I look at Vardac's book, I seem to hear audiences of the period crying out for film to be invented before

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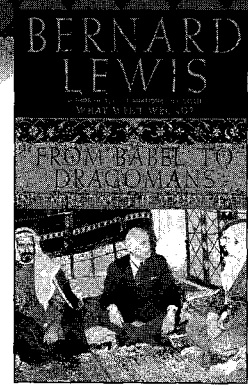

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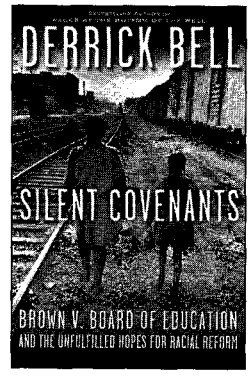

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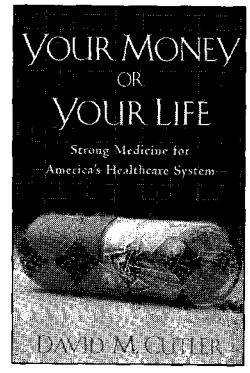

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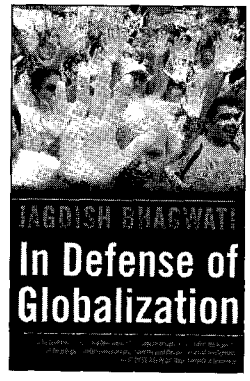

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they even knew that it existed. How happy those audiences would have been to see *Troy*. Physical limitations are gone. If we like, we can go to films simply to be stunned by the limitless. Yes, to tick the obvious, the theater's unique powers are at least as strong as they have ever been, and the mere gluttonous heaping of spectacle onto film is at best boring, at worst disgusting. But when a spectacular film rests on at least a minimal armature of character and cogent action, as *Troy* does, we can just sink back and enjoy. What we enjoy is the sovereignty over time and place and the force of gravity that film has given to the world. ■

James Wood

Textual Harassment

AFTER THEORY
By Terry Eagleton
(Basic Books, 231 pp., $25)

I.

WHEN I ATTENDED Cambridge in the mid-1980s, "theory" was sickly ripe. What looked like its fiercest flush of life, the red of its triumph, was in fact the unnatural coloring of fever. Paul de Man had just died, Harold Bloom was preparing his second career as a weak misreader of Clifton Fadiman, Roland Barthes was gone, the Yale gang of deconstructionists was breaking up, and much postmodern silliness among the signifiers was just around the corner. No one knew what was ahead, of course, and so at Cambridge there still reigned an assumption that the weakling liberal humanist undergraduate, fresh from his thoroughly untheoretical high school, had to be swiftly broken down and reconstituted. One college tutor, now a distinguished feminist/New Historicist scholar of Renaissance literature, told me that my first essay—on Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin, of all antiquities—was "an able museum-piece," and that I would have to be "saved."

The most common and least painful route to theoretical salvation went through Terry Eagleton's brisk and blokeish primer *Literary Theory* (1983), probably the best-selling book on its subject in Britain and America. (It has apparently sold three hundred thousand copies in Britain alone.) Being greedy for salvation, I found myself eating up many of Eagleton's books, including his early Marxist statement, *Criticism and Ideology* (1976), the book that established him as the leading Marxist literary theorist of his generation. I was suitably impressed by this book, and my freshman copy, which I still have, has a list of awestruck words written in pencil on its inside page. They are like a robot's talking points: "subjectivism/positivism/humanism/collectivism/essentialism/determinism." They represent, I assume, the first faltering steps in the new language that I had to learn. But even I, like surely every reader, skipped the infamous second chapter, "Categories for a Materialist Criticism," which lays out a science of reading:

> It is possible to set out in schematic form the major constituents of a Marxist theory of literature. They can be listed as follows:
> General Mode of Production (GMP)
> Literary Mode of Production (LMP)
> General Ideology (GI)
> Authorial Ideology (AI)
> Aesthetic Ideology (AI)
> Text

Now, older and wiser, one can only laugh at the way in which the poor battered text—the actual literature—is squashed into sixth place in that daunting list, sat upon by a litter of five pre-emptive categories, as if the text were some embarrassing runt, some impertinence of the real. Once Eagleton has established his categories, the chapter swells into a thumping headache of acronyms, closer in sound to a Pentagon report than to criticism: "A GMP produces a GI which contributes to reproducing it; it also produces a (dominant) LMP which in general reproduces and is reproduced by the GI." The chapter concludes with some reflections on the writer, whom Eagleton calls "the literary producer." Naturally, he has little time for "the bourgeois-Romantic category of the producer as 'individual creator.'" And finally there is the text itself: "The literary text is the product of a specific overdetermined conjuncture of the elements or formations set out schematically above. It is not, however, a merely passive product." Well, as that bourgeois grumbler Larkin has it in one of his poems, "useful to get that learned."

"THEORY" HAS BEEN RESPONsible for many things, good and bad. If the general standard in, say, athletics, concert pianism, and viniculture has risen in the last thirty years, so it has too in academic literary criticism, and for some of the same reasons (increased competition, professionalization, money, and markets). Terry Eagleton is right when he says, in his latest book, that there can be no return to a pre-theoretical innocence. No university teacher of literature has been untouched by theory; even its enemies speak some of its language, if not its jargon. One could say, very broadly, that theory stiffened criticism by allowing it to become more philosophical. It encouraged criticism to be far more rigorous, self-examining, and dialectically ingenious than it generally had been. Graham Hough, once a well-known Cambridge academic, remarked of literature in 1966 in *Essay on Criticism* that "We know what it is, pretty well." The clubbable and complacent universalism (who is "we"?), the unquestioning domicile inside what Foucault was calling an episteme ("we know what it is"), the primacy of taste over argument, and the idea that criticism is just a matter of good old English fudging ("pretty well")—all that is gone forever, and no serious person misses it.

One way of looking at theory is to see it as the inevitable culmination not of Marx, but of Freud. One of the decisive changes that theory effected was to introduce the idea that texts do not know themselves. It is the critic's business to reveal their repressed anxieties and incoherences. There are no moments of pure innocence anymore. The deconstructionist will use these moments of undecidability, these "aporias," to demonstrate how the text unconsciously undermines itself. The feminist, the cultural materialist, and the New Historicist will

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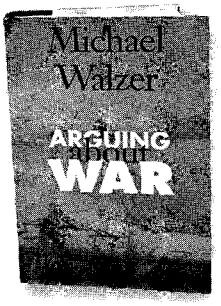

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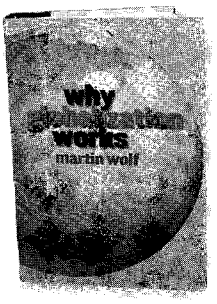

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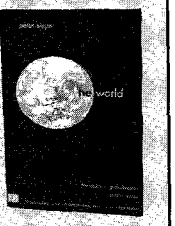

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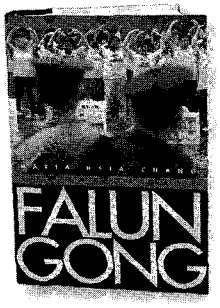

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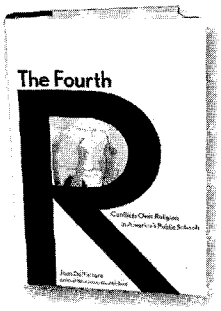

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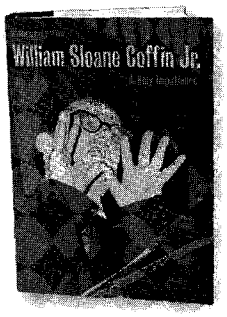

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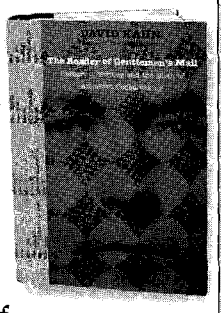

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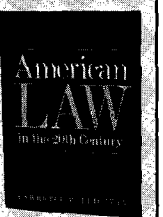

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see such fractures as the text's unwilling revelation of political anxiety. Hiddenness is what has changed, after Freud: that which is hidden for Freud and Derrida is hidden only at the cost of that which does the hiding; its absence marks the concealment. English criticism knew this about humans—the "unconscious" was hardly Freud's discovery, and De Quincey uttered the striking thought that "there is no such thing as forgetting"—but not about texts. Pater, in his essay on style, writes that we know the great artist by "the tact of his omission," by what he leaves out. But after Freud we will always itchingly suspect that omission is really repression. We know that the omissions are there if we can only find them.

Of course, critics have always read texts against themselves. But one of theory's innovations has been to show that in some sense texts read themselves against themselves. Works of literature are rarely as coherent as they want to be and are often tellingly self-divided at significant moments of anxiety. A criticism that learns to attend to this kind of self-division will probably be more energetically involved than most pre-theoretical criticism has been with the entanglements of content and form.

But these changes have also had considerable negative influence. The hunt for how a text betrays itself has too often been prosecutorial—and prosecuted, one feels, by people who do not love literature. Once criticism becomes a matter of searching for symptoms, it is relieved of the burden of evaluation, of deciding what is good and what is not. All symptoms are interesting, after all, whether in *Middlemarch* or on MTV. It is in this sense that deconstruction menaces literature, and this is why writers are correct to feel uneasy in its presence. Whereas a New Critic believed that we struggle, as readers, through incoherence toward a desirable, if often thwarted, formal coherence, a final coherence that the writer has intended, planned, superbly shaped, modern theory reverses this flow, moving backward from its presumption that works of literature are covering up their own incoherences, whatever the writer's good intentions are, and that they must be accordingly unmasked. The humanist was interested in good intentions; the theorist is interested in bad symptoms. The humanist gave innocence the benefit of the doubt; the theorist doubts innocence. To this extent, contemporary writers, however adept they have become at speaking the languages of theory and postmodernism, are closer to the old-fashioned humanist than to the cultural theorist, and doubtless always will be: writers have a great deal invested in the innocence of literary intention.

II.

So it turns out that theory, like any mode of reading, has to be performed sensitively; and it turns out that insensitive theoretical reading likely did more harm than insensitive untheoretical reading. Over the years, as this insensitivity seemed to become almost systemic, many theorists themselves switched horses, or turned tail. The genre of "confessions of a former theorist" is burgeoning at about the same pace as confessions of former supporters of the Iraq war. Some of the pioneers, such as Stephen Heath and Colin McCabe, dropped a few pounds of jargon and squeezed themselves anew into the English language, sensibly retaining what had been most valuable in their earlier work. Others, such as Christopher Norris, attacked what they saw as the new decadence of postmodernism. Harold Bloom, who claimed without much evidence that he had never been any kind of deconstructionist, became a sort of Book-of-the-Month-Club armchair-alec. Frank Lentricchia recanted everything he had espoused and began to sound like Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch or Orville Prescott.

And here is Terry Eagleton, the old Marxist "literary producer" himself, with a new book that violently assaults postmodern cultural theory, and which seeks to offer a credit and debit sheet for theory's successes and excesses. It ought to be a valuable revisionist work, and it is indeed often suggestive and highly intelligent. Yet it is marked by the same intellectual cost-cutting, matey bombast, vulgar haste, and final incoherence that made *Literary Theory* a less-than-finished work. There is, first, the question of Eagleton's style. By the standards of theory, Eagleton writes like Hazlitt: he is fluent, stylish, punchily funny, vivid, compact, and down to earth. But by any higher literary standard, he falls too often into a crowd-pleasing perpetual vivacity of style, a laddish, overly journalistic surplus. It is a style in which the truth cannot be told. *After Theory*, billed as the successor to *Literary Theory*, and hence aimed, one imagines, at college students, suffers especially from an atmosphere of merry simplification. One is reminded—Eagleton will not like the comparison with the swinish old medievalist—of C. S. Lewis's popular radio broadcasts on theological matters. Both writers exhibit the teacher's anxiety that unless complexity is rendered in bright colors, it will look too gray.

For a start, Eagleton has never met a crude binarism that he does not like. The theorist supposedly suspicious of such things is forever setting up fake alternatives. After theory's advent, "there can be no going back to an age when it was enough to pronounce Keats delectable or Milton a doughty spirit." Well, since that age hovers around 1920, there can indeed be no such return. Eagleton, like other British cultural materialists such as Terence Hawkes and Alan Sinfield, persistently defends theory against a caricature of pre-theoretical criticism. In Eagleton's rhetorical world, English and American criticism before 1960 was a snobbish drawing room filled by the jowls of Maurice Bowra and "Dadie" Rylands, posh old gents who could just taste good literature like good claret.

> In the bad old days, it was assumed that culture was something you needed to have in your blood, like malaria or red corpuscles. Countless generations of breeding went into the way a gentleman could instantly distinguish a sprightly metaphor from a shop-soiled one. Culture was not really something you could acquire, any more than you could acquire a second pair of eyebrows or learn how to have an erection. Your judgments on Stendhal and Rembrandt were as spontaneous as a sneeze, as instinctive as opening doors for elderly ladies. Theory, which as we have seen was born somewhere in the dense, democratic jungle of the 1960s, thought otherwise. All you needed in order to join in the game was to learn certain ways of talking, not to have a couple of thoroughbreds tethered outside the door. And these ways of talking were in principle open to anyone.

It is troubling to think of credulous students who know no better swallowing these pithy falsities. Eagleton's memoir, *The Gatekeeper*, which appeared in 2002, operates at a similar level, persistently extracting easy laughs from a caricature of the 1960s Cambridge that he attended as an undergraduate. It was a place

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where "chinless young blades stamped their feet and hooted in cinemas at the feeblest of jokes, and elbowed the cowed townspeople off the thin medieval pavements." At the Cambridge college where Eagleton gained his research fellowship, the president of High Table "failed entirely to recognize me and mistook me for a kitchen boy who had arrived to inform them of some last-minute change of menu." You would never guess, from this *Decline and Fall*–like description, that at least two generations of clever young grammar school boys from lower-middle-class or working-class families had attended the place before he arrived. Likewise, you would never guess, from his wild either/ors, that Anglo-American criticism before 1960 had been both theoretical and cosmopolitan. For every "Dadie" Rylands or Graham Hough there was John Crowe Ransom, R.P. Blackmur, William Empson, W.H. Auden, I.A. Richards, Ian Watt, Donald Davie, Northrop Frye—all of whom had a considerable tendency toward the theoretical, and none of whom, to the best of my knowledge, kept a pair of thoroughbreds outside his study door.

BUT THEN EAGLETON REGULARLY writes as if no one not practicing his kind of theory can ever *really* be theoretical. He breezily remarks that theory, "strictly speaking ... goes back as far as Plato," and then forgets to speak strictly, preferring instead to see theory as merely the great brainchild of 1960s leftism: "it is really a product of an extraordinary decade and a half, from about 1965 to 1980." That art history, anthropology, musicology (and in particular ethnomusicology), biblical criticism, and philosophy were all highly theoretical fields well before Pierre Macherey wrote *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire,* in 1966, is conveniently forgotten. Theory, he writes at one moment, is not interested in the question "Is this poem valuable?" It prefers the question "What do we mean by calling a poem good or bad?" And Eagleton continues:

> Instead of asking whether the novel has an implausible plot, it asks itself what a novel is anyway. Instead of asking whether the clarinet concerto is slightly too cloying to be entirely persuasive, it inquires about the material conditions which you need to produce concertos in the first place, and

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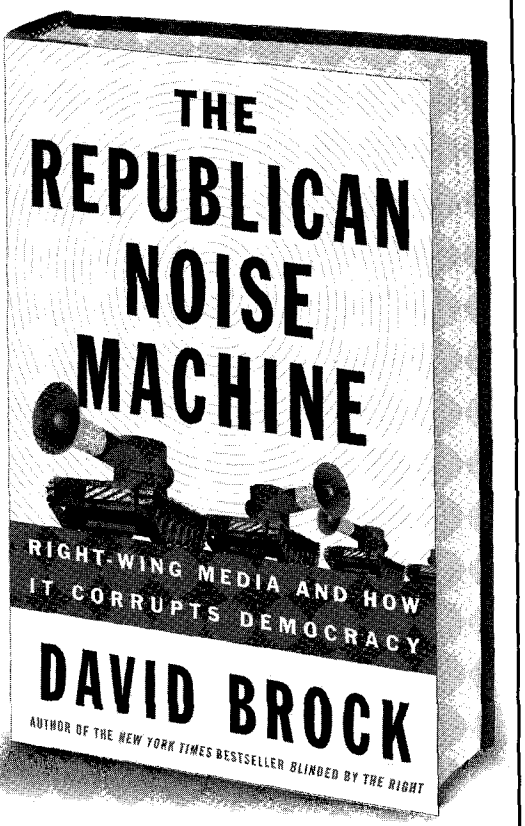

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> how these help to shape the work itself. . . . Critics talk about the character of Coriolanus, while theorists ask how it comes about that a pattern of words on a page can appear to be a person.

One can just see all those music students discussing with Alexander Goehr or Charles Rosen the "slightly too cloying" nature of the Finzi clarinet concerto. (And so what if they did?) It is telling that Eagleton's example of the ludicrously non-theoretical is taken from a discipline precisely defined by theory, in which a high command of technical analysis and language has almost been continuous with musical performance itself. One hopes this is only caricature, because its alternative is ignorance.

IF THEORY IS HERE DEFINED AGAINST a caricature of liberal humanism, it is also defined against a caricature of dastardly capitalism. The "tasteless, clueless philistines who run the world and whose lexicon stretches only to words like oil, golf, power and cheeseburger"—guess which country he is talking about—are people who may well be menaced by theory, "men who have never been excited by an idea, moved by a landscape or enthralled by the transcendent elegance of a mathematical solution. You may develop grave doubts about those who have the nerve to speak of defending civilization and would not recognize an obelisk or an oboe concerto if it were to slap them in the face. These are the men and women who prate of freedom and would recognize it only in the form of a hand-out."

This is just an intellectual's dockyard rabble-rousing. Keen readers of Eagleton will recall earlier, similar formulations. In the days when he was just beginning to attack American deconstruction, he used to argue that its apolitical procedures threatened no one in the White House or in the boardrooms of Standard Oil. For a while, the White House and Standard Oil were his favored metonymies. The names sought a knowing tone, a worldliness, but in fact they suggested an almost charmingly canonical idea of power and its centers. Likewise, in the paragraph above, one almost wishes that Eagleton's babyish picture were true, for then such power might be easier to deal with. Amid these airy fantasies it almost seems churlish to observe that, say, Jeremy Greenstock, the British ambassador who supported the Iraq war and spent six months working for the coalition forces, has much better Greek and Latin than Terry Eagleton (he taught classics at Eton), and might even be able to render "obelisk" in several languages. But then, one definition of rhetoric is that it scrabbles free of irritatingly obstructive denotation, and Eagleton is certainly a high-class rhetor.

ALL THIS RUSTLING UP OF CARIcatured enemies is strange, because in this new book Eagleton is not really defending theory anyway. Or if he does finally defend it, he also spends a good deal of time attacking it. For his other great foe is postmodernism, which is also theory, and which broadly means deconstruction, cultural studies, and all theory since the heady days of the 1960s and 1970s. In a footnote, he defines postmodernism as "the contemporary movement of thought which rejects totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence and the possibility of objective knowledge." Eagleton dislikes this branch of theory, because, as a lapsed Catholic and an unlapsed Marxist, he believes in truth, foundations, and totalities. He has never had any time for American post-structuralism, which seems to him like fiddling while Rome burns. If you believe in revolution, or even if you just believe in maintaining the importance of the category of revolution, you will tend to believe in grand narratives, despite what Lyotard once ruled about their disappearance.

Readers will disagree about the extent to which Eagleton also caricatures his great postmodern enemy. Like many radical academics, he has a habit of taking the American classroom as paradigmatic—it's that Standard Oil problem again—so that in Eagleton's account all postmodern thought is an obviously absurd matter of "quietly-spoken middle-class students huddle[d] diligently in libraries on sensationalist subjects like vampirism and eye-gouging, cyborgs and porno movies." It never has anything to do with, say, building the Guggenheim Bilbao. Postmodernism, for Eagleton, is just sex-crazy, body-obsessed, apolitical American academic footling. "Students once wrote uncritical, reverential essays on Flaubert, but all that has been transformed. Nowadays they write uncritical, reverential essays on *Friends*." Not all students of culture, however, "are blind to the Western narcissism involved in

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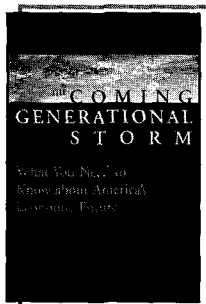
working on the history of pubic hair while half the world's population lacks adequate sanitation and survives on less than two dollars a day."

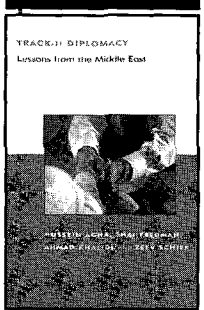
Eagleton is often sharply funny at postmodernism's expense, and his gibes are shrewd. He points out that the postmodern fetishizing of "difference" and "the Other" simplifies cultures: "With an arrogance thinly masked as humility, the cult of the Other assumes that there are no major conflicts or contradictions within the social majority itself." The "postmodern cult of the migrant" is a good deal "too supercilious," and is really just a rebirth of the modernist snobbism about exile. But "the problem at the moment is that the rich have mobility while the poor have locality." Temperamentally, Eagleton is really a tragic modernist. He likes Beckett because he refused to turn his gaze from "the intolerableness of things, even if there is no transcendent consolation at hand." Yet "the post-tragic realm of postmodernism" is a realm in which "there is indeed no salvation, but on the other hand nothing to be saved."

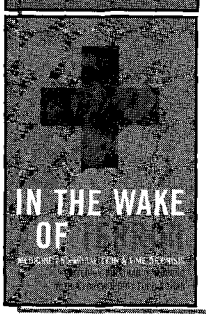
Postmodernism seems to Eagleton morally frivolous because it is politically toothless. With the help of Bernard Williams, he defends conventional foundations of truth and objectivity against the relativism of certain postmodernists; with the help of Alasdair MacIntyre, he easily wins the argument that we do indeed, as humans, share a common nature (postmodernists tend to be nervous about such universalism, fearing its conservatism). He inveighs also against pragmatists such as Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish: they commit the usual academic error of inflating the role of language—"an error native to intellectuals, as melancholia is endemic among clowns," he drolly adds. They are obsessed with our supposed inability to get outside the cultural moment that we inhabit, and their sense of the impossibility of finding an ideal Archimedean point of disinterestedness means that they fall into utter political complacency. Trenchantly, he observes that "you do not have to be standing in metaphysical outer space to recognize the injustice of racial discrimination. This is exactly where you would not recognize it.... There are many different, contradictory strands to a culture, some of which allow us to be critical of others." Postmodernism's love of "anti-essentialism is largely the product of philosophical amateurism and ignorance." There is not enough writing of this order, alas.

III.

EAGLETON'S BOOK SOMETIMES reminds me of the observation of the Sex Pistols that "I don't know what I want, but I know how to get it." The incoherence of his book lies not just in the fact that he both attacks and defends theory, but that he does both things in the name of saving a kind of original or untarnished theory from its contemporary decadence. On the one hand, the theory that was born "in the dense, democratic jungle of the 1960s" has bequeathed imperishable insights about gender and sexuality, about text and author, about culture and society; but on the other hand, most theory since the early 1980s, or what Eagleton calls "cultural theory as we have it," has failed to deal with fundamental problems: "It has been shamefaced about morality and metaphysics, embarrassed







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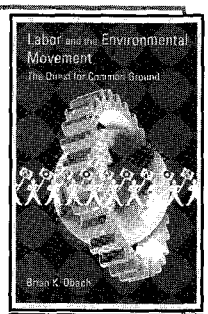

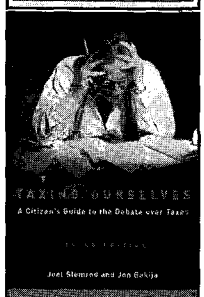

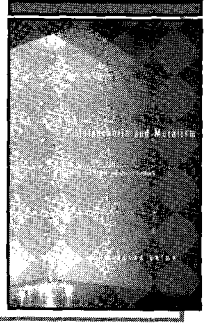

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about love, biology, religion and revolution, largely silent about evil, reticent about death and suffering, dogmatic about essences, universals and foundations, and superficial about truth, objectivity and disinterestedness."

Pass over the awkwardness that if something has been "superficial about truth" then it has probably been, well, untrue. What is strange about this passage is that Eagleton does not want to see that, if this later theoretical failure is related to the earlier theoretical vigor of the 1960s and 1970s, then the later decadence in some respects must pass judgment on the validity of the earlier vigor. Either these two different manifestations of theory, so different in effect, have nothing to do with each other, in which case he should stop calling the postmodernist thought he dislikes "theory"; or they are indeed related, in which case it may well be harder than he imagines to rejuvenate the old-fashioned theory he likes. Eagleton is a kind of deadbeat dad of theory, shaking his head at his own offspring and saying, "No, they're not mine!"

This probably explains his haziness about terms. In this book, "theory" (a good thing) is constantly blending into "cultural theory" (sometimes a good thing and sometimes not, especially when it is "cultural theory as we have it"), or blending into "postmodern theory" and "cultural studies" (almost always bad things). Naughtily, Eagleton calls Fish and Rorty "anti-theorists," because they are happy to let the world stay just as it is, while "real" theory wants to change it; but he must know that Rorty's first major book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, was a vigorous piece of post-structuralist theorizing, thoroughly indebted to precisely the 1960s and 1970s theory that Eagleton wants to defend. At other times Eagleton so inflates the category of theory that it would be impossible to disagree with its necessity. Theory is, at base, "a new self-consciousness about what we are doing." "Critics of theory," he writes, too often "complain that its devotees seem to find theory more exciting than the works of art it is meant to illuminate. But sometimes it is. Freud is a lot more fascinating than Cecil Day Lewis. Foucault's *The Order of Things* is a good deal more arresting and original than the novels of Charles Kingsley." Those coarse binarisms, again: how Eagleton loves to rise between two stools!

Yellow Jackets

I was in awe of the way they lived in both
the ground and air, both digging and flying, both
demon and angel. I was ready to kill them
with gasoline when I noticed my neighbor's burning
eyes across the street. I could tell from the way
he was looking at the can that he wanted them dead
for no other reason than wanting them dead.
I put down the can and rose to the height
of the just cut grass, high enough to see
the sills of heaven, yet not so high to keep
from burning with a few unnatural questions.
"Have you ever got down on your knees and listened
to the buzz of your own grief, then seen your face
in another face as different from yours as a yellow
jacket? Have you ever swelled with a tiny sting
then feared for your life?" I hit the ground with dangerous
force when he turned away, so high was that inch
to which I had risen. The bees awoke from the thud
of my weight and stormed from their hole in quick
pursuit. I fled like a fool into the street and then
his yard with a dozen stings on my legs and arms,
but oh what pleasure I took in causing him envy.

CHARD DE NIORD

And "theory" is now Freud? Theory is certainly Freudian; but most people would want to distinguish Freud and "theory," for fear of enlarging the word into meaninglessness.

It is partly Eagleton's own style of continuous exaggeration that scatters his argument. Once the theory of the 1960s has been unnaturally severed from a caricature of the liberal humanism that preceded it, and unnaturally severed from a caricature of the postmodern theory that succeeded it, it is left without head or limbs, a torso that he perversely wants to get up and walking again, but which is denied the tools of locomotion. An account of 1960s and 1970s theory that linked it not merely to modernism but also to early twentieth-century language philosophy, to the Russian Formalism of the 1920s, and to the Frankfurt School of the 1930s (all of which Eagleton is very knowledgeable about), that took the patience to see what was already theoretical in, say, the mid-century criticism of Erich Heller or Harry Levin, might be able to find within theory the resources necessary for its rescue. But Eagleton's Marxist imperative to see theory as just the achievement of the 1960s left, the product of "the only period since the Second World War in which the political far left rose briefly to prominence, before sinking almost out of sight," leaves him bereft of the materials appropriate for such renovation.

Thus, in the strangest chapter of this book, "Losses and Gains," in which Eagleton takes stock of theory's achievements and failures, he finds himself curiously incapable of mounting a convincing defense of theory at all. "What have been cultural theory's achievements? To begin with, it has disabused us of the idea that there is a single correct way to interpret a work of art." But who were all those untheoretical critics who believed that artworks yielded single correct readings? Theory's second legacy, apparently, is that "it has persuaded us that there are many things involved in the making of a work of art besides the author." But it was Virginia Woolf who argued that a female writer needed a room of her own and five hundred pounds a year. Third, theory has instructed us about the connections between culture and power, he says; it has brought culture and cultural politics to the fore. This is the least arguable of Eagleton's claims. Yet he knows better than most Walter Benjamin's famous remark about every document of culture being also a document of barbarism; and though Benjamin was clearly a theorist, and has been retroactively claimed by contemporary theory, the German mandarin essayist comfortably pre-dates Eagleton's "dense, democratic jungle of the 1960s."

In a curious if inevitable paradox, Eagleton seems to be able to show us why we need theory only in a rather theoretical way. His book characteristically proceeds at an impressive altitude of generality, rarely choosing to give chapter and verse for its lapsed theology. And lapsed theology is exactly what it turns out to be. In the book's most interesting and valuable

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section, Eagleton lays out some of the areas in which a renovated and properly political theory might do its new work. His sponsor here is Aristotle, and much of Eagleton's commentary doggedly follows Aristotle's lead in the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Eagleton champions Aristotle's notion of living according to the virtues, and of goodness as its own reward. He notes that ethics for Aristotle is the domain of the political, and he mixes Aristotle with a Marxist reading of Jesus's teachings. This is the Jesus he once distinguished, in his memoir, from the avenging God of the Old Testament: "The other image of God is of he who does not need to be appeased because he has forgiven us already, and scandalously accepts us just as we are. This image of God, as counsel for the defense or even as co-defendant in the dock, is known as Jesus, friend of the shit of the earth." Yes, but there is also the sterner Jesus who does not scandalously accept us just as we are, but who exactly refuses to accept us just as we are, the Jesus who becomes the basis of Paul's fierce imperatives, the Jesus who tells the puzzled Nicodemus that he will have to be spiritually born again, and his disciples that they must cleave to him and forget their families. That is the Jesus for whom salvation is not just a matter of doing but also of believing.

In an ideally Christian world, Eagleton writes, we would cherish each other's autonomy, and "become the occasion for each other's self-realization." Socialism is the political environment most likely to allow the kind of self-flourishing of which Aristotle speaks. "Love means creating for another the kind of space in which he can flourish, as the same time as he does this for us.... The socialist society is one in which each attains his or her freedom and autonomy in and through the self-realization of others." Of course, there is no mention of the fact that socialism in its most rigid forms has often failed to give its people the kind of autonomy that Eagleton craves (somehow I don't think that by "socialism" Eagleton means Sweden). What is more interesting is that Eagleton begins to sound more like an Aristotelian liberal than a Marxian theorist. Theory, he avers, has not dealt forthrightly with morality, yet the kind of morality found in the work of the great novelists should be a nourishing and complex example for theory. "Morality, as, say, Henry James understood it," is "an intricately woven texture of nuances." Yes, it is, and Lionel Trilling and R. P. Blackmur would not have disagreed.

Theory, as Eagleton wants it, seems to be, in the end, traditional philosophical ethics with a bit of old-fashioned Marxism, temperamentally characterized by a tragic-religious modernist outlook. It is, above all, a form of political engagement; Eagleton's new book agrees with its predecessor on this score. But Eagleton, oddly enough, is most imprecise about what he cares most about: theory and politics. We come back to the larger imprecision of Eagleton's rhetoric. He writes that just as postmodernism was announcing the death of grand narratives, "a peculiarly ugly such narrative was launched in the war between capital and the Koran." This sounds good, and he is always drawn to easy alliteration. But a moment's reflection reveals its simplification. Osama bin Laden, too, has a great deal of capital, most of it made from a highly capitalist society, which in turn has gotten rich by selling its oil to the Great Satan itself, America. Capital may well be part of the problem here, but the problem is not itself a simple binarism.

Or take this extraordinary outburst, near the end of the book. America, Eagleton claims, is a society that is afraid of death, a childishly optimistic and voluntarist society, a place that refuses to see life in its properly tragic colors. "In such a culture there can be no real tragedy, whatever terrifying events may occur from time to time." The breathtaking generalization, the theorist's disdain for the masses, the arctic chill that blows over that sentence—here one hears an authentic Marxism for the first time. But what this kind of rhetoric cannot be, precisely because of its almost Zarathustran altitude, is an authentic politics. And yet Eagleton never stops talking about politics.

Eagleton's politics remains shadowy, imprecise, and thoroughly theoretical just because it can never be realized. Indeed, one might say that his theory needs an extreme politics so that it can safely never be realized, and his politics needs theory so that it can stay safely theoretical. He would seem to be committed to the messianic idea of the always imminent, but never actualized, revolution. It is a religious politics and a religion of politics. When, recently, *The New York Times* asked him for political specifics, he replied: "Get out of NATO. Get rid of capitalism." I fear he was being serious. ■

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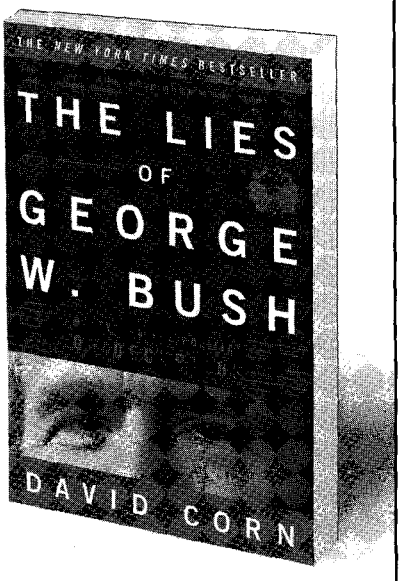

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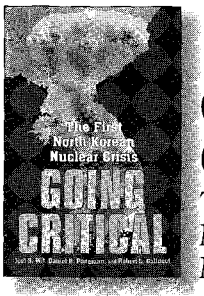

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Alan Brinkley
The End of an Elite

THE GUARDIANS:
KINGMAN BREWSTER, HIS CIRCLE, AND THE RISE OF THE LIBERAL ESTABLISHMENT
By Geoffrey Kabaservice
(Henry Holt, 573 pp., $30)

THE COMMITMENT OF AMERica's great universities to admitting students on the basis of merit rather than lineage—whether or not that commitment is wholly observed in practice—is today virtually uncontested. Similarly, the belief in the value of diversity, while under assault in courts and legislatures, is a core conviction of almost all educators. Among its many other achievements, Geoffrey Kabaservice's account of the career of Kingman Brewster, who served as president of Yale from 1963 to 1977, makes clear how recently and with what difficulty the world of higher education embraced these and other now-common values.

Consider the experience of R. Inslee Clark, who became director of admissions at Yale in 1965. Clark had the typical profile of a senior Ivy League administrator of his time. He was a Yale College graduate, an alumnus of Skull and Bones (the college's most elite secret society), and a former teacher at the Lawrenceville School. But he was hardly typical in other ways. When Brewster asked him whether he aspired to be an "engineer" or an "architect" of Yale's admissions policy, Clark (who was then thirty) said unhesitatingly: "an architect . . . I'd like to design a different student body from the one we have now." The extraordinary education that Yale offered, he argued, should serve "the most able, the most motivated, those with the most potential," not just those with the appropriate social background. Brewster supported this vision, and together—perhaps unaware of the furor that it would create—he and Clark set out to realize it.

A few months after taking his new job Clark visited Andover, which had long been Yale's largest "feeder school." When asked what his attitude would be toward the bottom quarter of the Andover class (a group accustomed to favored treatment at Ivy League universities), Clark answered bluntly: "Yale can do a lot better than the bottom quarter at Andover." The response was savage. Yale alumni who had attended Andover (many of whom had come from the now-scorned bottom quarter of the class) wrote furiously to Brewster, to the board of trustees, and to one another protesting the change. The Yale Corporation, the university's small governing body drawn from the high elite of Yale alumni, summoned Clark to one of its meetings. After listening to Clark explain his policies, one member replied: "Let me get down to basics. You are admitting an entirely different class than we're used to. You're admitting them for a different purpose than training leaders." Clark replied that the world was changing, that leaders would likely now emerge from untraditional sources. His challenger responded: "You're talking about Jews and public school graduates as leaders. Look around you at this table. These are America's leaders. There are no Jews here. There are no public school graduates here."

That statement was more true than not, even in 1965, not just at Yale but throughout much of American academia. Kabaservice's central argument in this ambitious book is that members of a generation of leaders drawn from traditional elites were complicit in the shattering of their own monopoly on leadership; that the much-derided WASP establishment became, for a short time, part of the process of its own dethroning. Although Kingman Brewster is at the center of this story, Kabaservice gives significant attention as well to other establishment figures from Yale who formed, he argues, a coherent "circle," reinforcing one another in the task of trying to advance (but also to moderate) the vast transformations that the nation was experiencing in the 1960s and 1970s. The group included McGeorge Bundy,

Alan Brinkley is Allan Nevins Professor of History and provost at Columbia University.

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Cyrus Vance, John Lindsay, Paul Moore, and Eliot Richardson.

While Kabaservice has had to reach (sometimes a considerable distance) to connect several of these men to the process of progressive social change, the collective portrait provides some support to his argument. But it also feels at times like a distraction from what is essentially a biography of Brewster, who exemplifies better than any of the others (with the notable exception of Paul Moore, an aristocratic Yale socialite who became a controversial reformer as Episcopal bishop of Washington and New York) the way in which those who were in some ways the most threatened by social change in the 1960s managed to embrace and to advance it.

Brewster, Kabaservice claims, had "the hallmark of one whom the gods had ordained to be a leader." His family could trace its lineage to the *Mayflower*. His father was a wealthy, successful, and (unlike his son) politically reactionary lawyer, who spent most of his career in Washington. His mother was an educated and sophisticated woman with a strong interest in literature and the arts, and with significant inherited wealth. His parents divorced a few years after Kingman's birth in 1919, and he spent most of his youth living first in his mother's imposing family home in Springfield and then, after her remarriage to a Harvard professor, in Cambridge. He spent summers sailing off Martha's Vineyard. He attended the Belmont Hill School in suburban Boston and was alone among his classmates in choosing to go to Yale rather than to Harvard (in an era when young men at elite schools largely chose the universities that they would attend, rather than the other way around).

Brewster was an active, prominent, and successful undergraduate at Yale. He was tapped for Skull and Bones but declined to join, claiming that the secret process of electing members was incompatible with his democratic principles. But Brewster did not need the validation of Skull and Bones. He was already an undisputed campus leader: chairman of the *Yale Daily News*, president of the Elizabethan Club (an elite literary society), head of the undergraduate political union. Although he partook avidly in the social life of the college, he also looked critically at some of Yale's ossified traditions. "The world we shall live and work in is being refashioned," he wrote in the first editorial he published in the *Yale Daily News*. "Parts of the Yale machinery that are rusty with complacency and stiff with tradition will have to be hauled out and re-examined."

Brewster's most significant commitment at Yale was not to the college at all, but to a controversial position on the greatest issue facing the world in the late 1930s: the specter of a second world war. Brewster was a founding member of the America First Committee, which eventually became the leading organization in the effort to keep the United States out of World War II. Much maligned in retrospect for its many reactionary arguments, for the anti-Semitism of some of its members, and most of all for having taken a position discredited by history, it began as an optimistic, democratic movement of the left. Combining a vague Christian pacifism with a romantic faith in democracy, Brewster argued against fighting the Nazis, insisting that "nazi-ism can only be defeated by making democracy work as an alternative."

Many reputations—including that of the idolized Charles Lindbergh, whom an adoring Brewster invited to speak at Yale—were destroyed by their connection with America First. Brewster, who was frenetically active on behalf of the movement, speaking widely on campuses and radio stations around the country, emerged from this misbegotten effort unscathed, possibly even strengthened. Perhaps that was because he resigned from America First in the spring of 1941, after the passage of the Lend-Lease Act, which he unconvincingly argued made the committee's efforts moot. Perhaps, too, it was because Brewster was so securely part of the eastern establishment elite, so widely considered a young man of golden promise, that he paid here, as elsewhere, a much smaller price for being wrong than did others.

In any case, he was quick to put his America First past behind him and join his establishment-bound contemporaries as a staunch Anglophilic internationalist. Brewster worked in the State Department under Nelson Rockefeller, served in the Navy Air Corps, and entered the postwar world convinced that he was destined to be a leader of a generation whose "best years" would "fall in the zenith of American power and potential." He went to Harvard Law School, where he helped to organize the Massachusetts chapter of the American

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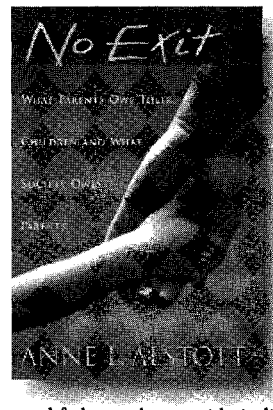

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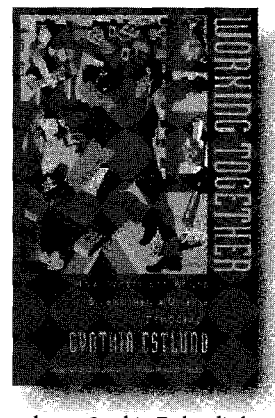

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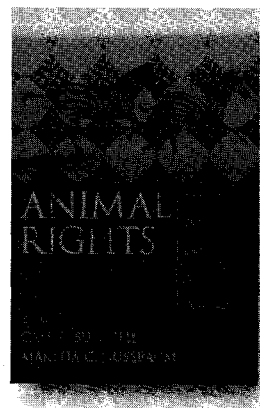

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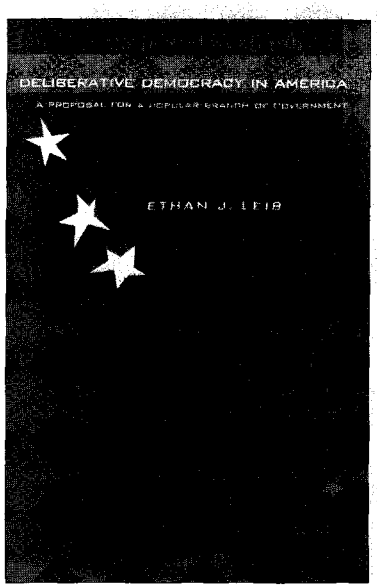

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Veterans Committee and became active in United World Federalists. After graduation he moved to Paris to help administer the Marshall Plan, returned to Cambridge to teach briefly at MIT, and then, in 1950, accepted a position on the faculty of Harvard Law School, where he remained for the next ten years. Harvard was a good platform for talented, ambitious young leaders to make connections and to expand their activities. Brewster—a conscientious teacher but an indifferent scholar—excelled at becoming a faculty leader at the university and at involving himself in establishment activities near and far. In 1960, while sailing off Martha's Vineyard with Yale president Whitney Griswold, he agreed to leave Harvard and to return to New Haven as provost.

BREWSTER WAS A GREAT ADMIRER of Griswold, and especially of Griswold's commitment to raising the academic quality of the Yale faculty. But he chafed sometimes at the president's conservatism on other matters. The social traditions that made Yale such an insular place were ones with which Griswold felt comfortable, but which Brewster disliked. Still, he was a pragmatist, and he devoted his energies to the things he knew he could help to change. He began working with his deans to attract "the best and the brightest" to Yale at the same time that many of his friends were in Washington helping President Kennedy attract "the best and the brightest" to government. Brewster's liberal energies seemed to infect Griswold as well, who in 1961 supported a proposal to democratize the Yale admissions process and to provide financial aid to all students who needed it. Before the plan could be implemented, however, Griswold died of cancer. Brewster was soon elected to succeed him.

Brewster's fourteen years as president of Yale were among the most important in the university's history—and they were important as well to the future of elite universities throughout the United States. The impact of those years was only partly a result of Brewster's own energies and talents. Some of the changes that he oversaw had been set in motion by his predecessor. And of course many of the changes that he embraced were forced on him by the wide-ranging social and cultural changes to which Brewster had to respond but which he in no way led. Yet when one looks at the leadership of other major universities that faced serious troubles in those years—Berkeley, Columbia, Harvard, and others—and considers the catastrophes that uncomprehending and uncompromising leaders brought to their institutions, it is hard not to be impressed with Brewster's performance at Yale.

BREWSTER ACCEPTED AND EVEN embraced a series of fundamental changes in the character of Yale that the new, more democratic ethos of the 1960s and 1970s all but required: coeducation, active recruitment of minorities, widening the base from which students at Yale were drawn, diversifying the curriculum and responding to new areas of knowledge that were emerging out of the turbulence of his time. He also responded better than most academic leaders to the challenges of student radicalism, and in the process saved Yale from the deep polarization that so damaged other major universities.

The character of Brewster's response to radicalism was particularly visible in the most famous event of his presidency: the turmoil following the American invasion of Cambodia in the spring of 1970. Yale students, like students on most American campuses, were radicalized by this jarring event; but that radicalization built upon already existing tensions connected to the impending murder trial in New Haven of Bobby Seale, the head of the Black Panther Party. Radicals from around the country were traveling to New Haven to protest the trial, putting additional pressure on Yale. Brewster gathered around him the friends and advisers on whom he had always relied. In the midst of the crisis, Brewster turned to Cyrus Vance late one night and said, "You know what this is all about? It is a test as to whether we are right or they are right."

University administrators had been saying the same thing on other campuses, but their version of the test was a choice between defending legitimate authority or surrendering to mayhem. Brewster was making an entirely different point. The test as he saw it was whether stability was best served by the hard-line divisiveness of the nation's political leaders at the time (symbolized by the tragedy of Kent State) or by what Kabaservice calls "the liberal establishment's tolerance, openness, and flexibility" and what Brewster himself called

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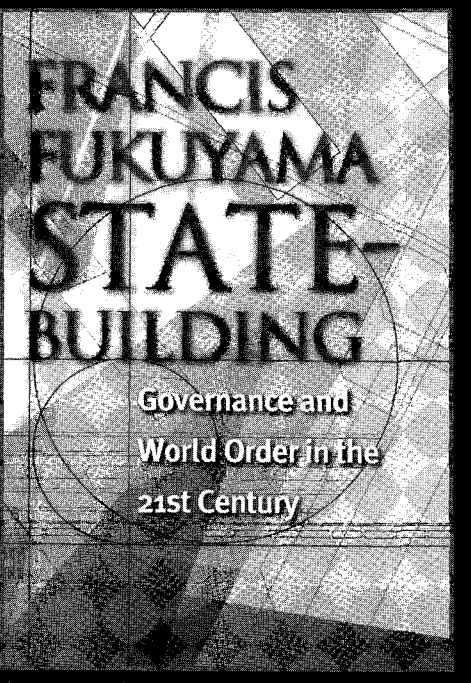
"taking the risk of latitude for freedom." Instead of denouncing the demonstrators pouring into New Haven, he welcomed them onto campus. Instead of rejecting their concerns, he told the Yale faculty that he was "skeptical of the ability of black revolutionaries to achieve a fair trial anywhere in the United States," a statement that inevitably found its way into the press and for which Brewster paid a very high price with the political establishment, Yale alumni, and others for many years.

But Yale survived the demonstrations, and the Vietnam era generally, without terrible violence or serious damage; and while the presidents of other troubled campuses were driven from office in the aftermath of turmoil, Brewster survived—weakened perhaps, but still a formidable figure—until he left Yale in 1977 to become the American ambassador to Britain. Brewster served successfully as ambassador throughout the Carter administration, practiced law (somewhat unhappily) for five years in New York and London, and in 1986 became master of University College, Oxford, where he was an outspoken defender of British academia against what he called the Thatcher government's "vendetta" against the universities. Two years later, he died of a stroke.

IT IS NOW FOUR DECADES SINCE Brewster became president of Yale. His almost effortless ascension to that position through the vehicles reserved for the old upper class appears an anachronism today. Although the United States still remains very far from being a true meritocracy, neither is it any longer a society ruled by an inherited aristocracy of leadership. Evidence of that is visible in Brewster's own cohort—Ivy League presidents—among whom there is no one today whose social profile looks even remotely like his. Women, Jews, African Americans, public school graduates, and others from backgrounds far different from those of Brewster and his establishment circle now occupy virtually all the major university presidencies, and a similar transformation has occurred in many other areas of society.

But Kingman Brewster, who could easily have become—like some of his contemporaries—a victim of this change, was in fact an agent of it. Cautiously, sometimes boldly, occasionally rashly, he advanced the very goals that most threat-



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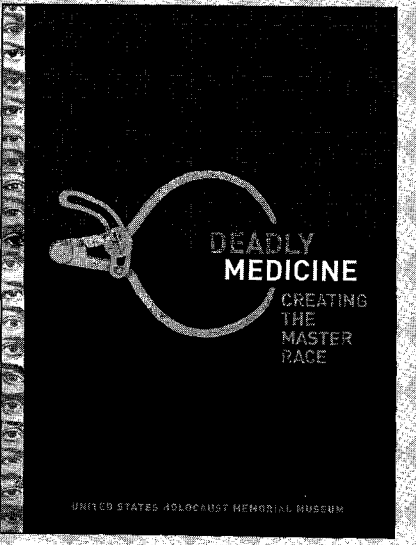

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ened his own social world. He surely knew that much of what he was doing was bound to diminish the influence of the traditional eastern establishment from which he had emerged, but he proceeded nevertheless. One could portray Brewster as the beneficiary of unearned social privilege, which to some degree he was. But one could also argue that he vindicated at least some part of the old establishment's role in modern America by helping transfer authority relatively peacefully from inherited elites to a more democratically chosen community of leaders. ■

Mark Polizzotti
Love in Vain

THE LEGEND IS KNOWN TO any blues fan: he was an eager kid sitting at the feet of his musical idols, borrowing the guitar he could scarcely play and generally making a nuisance of himself. Then one midnight he stood at a crossroads near Dockery's plantation, bartered his soul to the devil, and was next seen coaxing sounds from his strings such as no one had ever heard before, sounds that won him the throne in the pantheon of blues deities.

It sounds like the stuff of a bad screenplay, but a surprising number of listeners still cling to this vision of Robert Johnson as a demon-powered freak. Two new revisionist histories, however, espouse the more sober and less romantic view that Johnson was actually a dedicated and highly talented musician who wittingly produced masterful music. Even less popular is their contention that Johnson's current place in blues history is wholly out of proportion with the importance that he was granted by his peers. As Elijah Wald puts it at the outset of his contentious but valuable book, "As far as the evolution of black music goes, Robert Johnson was an extremely minor figure, and very little that happened in the decades following his death would have been affected if he had never played a note."

For the latter-day blues cult, there is no denying that Johnson is considered the *ur*-bluesman, on a par with such pioneers as Armstrong, Parker, Dylan, and Hendrix in their own genres, and placed well above the musicians who enjoyed far greater influence and success in their day. Despite Johnson's scant and generally unnoticed output (as far as is known, he recorded only twenty-nine sides plus twelve alternate takes, much of it unreleased in his lifetime), he now stands, in Greil Marcus's words, "as the most famous and influential blues musician who ever lived."

If anything, Johnson's long years of obscurity have only heightened his mystique. Until recently, it was virtually impossible to separate the apocryphal from the actual. The man seemed permanently cloaked in seductive mystery. When the only two known photographs of him first surfaced in the 1980s, they were greeted as a major revelation. (A much-contested third photo has recently been put into circulation.) The irony is that this obscurity is also something of a myth: both books stress that despite all the questions surrounding Johnson, his shadowy life, and his equivocal death, more is now known about him than about practically any other blues musician of that era.

The most reliable research indicates that Robert Leroy Johnson was born in Hazelhurst, Mississippi, on May 8, 1911 (though some documents suggest birth dates ranging between 1907 and 1912), the illegitimate son of Julia Major Dodds and a farmhand named Noah Johnson. Julia had ten previous children by her first husband, Charles Dodds, and a few years after Robert's birth she married a man named Dusty Willis. Charles meanwhile moved to Memphis with his ten children by Julia plus two from another woman, having changed his last name to Spencer to avoid a legal dispute. Johnson himself was known variously as Robert Spencer, R.L. Spencer, Little Robert Dusty, or Robert Dodds—further obscuring the few official traces of him that remain.

Much of his childhood was spent living alternately with his mother and stepfather in Robinsonville, Mississippi, and with the Dodds-Spencer brood in Memphis. His schooling, already interrupted by his periodic changes of address, was further hampered by poor eyesight due to a small cataract in his left eye and—no doubt more so—by frequent bouts of truancy during which he played harmonica for his friends. It was most likely in Memphis that he first picked up some rudiments of guitar-playing from an older brother and was exposed to the recordings of the early blues artists, notably Charley Patton. Patton was one of the most popular entertainers around, and Johnson, like many a young man then and since, must have identified the fashionable vogue of guitar blues as a way of escaping the farmwork to which he seemed fated.

By 1930, Johnson, then around nineteen and living with Julia and Willis in Robinsonville, had married a sixteen-year-old girl named Virginia Travis, who died that year in childbirth—an event that some claim started his life of wandering, though in fact he remained in the area for roughly another two years. Soon after Virginia's death, he began seeing a young woman named Vergie Mae Smith, by whom he had a son in December 1931 (Johnson's only legal heir), and while Vergie was still pregnant he married an older divorcée named Calletta Craft, whom he abandoned not long afterward.

It was also in 1930 that Johnson met one of his primary inspirations, the legendary bluesman Son House. Not only

ESCAPING THE DELTA: ROBERT JOHNSON AND THE INVENTION OF THE BLUES
By Elijah Wald
(Amistad, 342 pp., $24.95)

ROBERT JOHNSON: LOST AND FOUND
By Barry Lee Pearson and Bill McCulloch
(University of Illinois Press, 142 pp., $24.95)

MARTIN SCORSESE PRESENTS THE BLUES: A MUSICAL JOURNEY
Edited by Peter Guralnick, Robert Santelli, Holly George-Warren, Christopher John Farley
(Amistad, 287 pp., $27.95)

Mark Polizzotti is director of publications at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the author of REVOLUTION OF THE MIND: THE LIFE OF ANDRÉ BRETON *(Farrar, Straus and Giroux).*

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was House, by all accounts, a mesmerizing performer—in Wald's words, he "played like a man possessed by a fearsome and consuming spirit," and films made of him late in life seem to confirm this—but his success on the local dance circuit showed that one could indeed make a living with a guitar. Johnson grudgingly tried his hand at sharecropping, encouraged by his hardworking but narrow-minded stepfather, but on Saturday nights he would sneak out to hear House and his sideman Willie Brown (the "friend-boy Willie Brown" immortalized in "Cross Road Blues"). As House would tell it many times in later years, whenever he and Brown took five, Johnson would pick up their guitars and try to entertain the audience in their stead, even though his unskilled playing threatened to empty the place.

It was House who contributed one of the earliest and most enduring pieces of the Robert Johnson legend, and a key element in the belief that he acquired his talent in a deal with the devil. According to House, the young man disappeared for about six months, only to return with his own guitar and an exceptional ability to use it. This time, said House, "when that boy started playing, and when he got through, all our mouths were hanging open. All! He was gone!" Actually, most sources remember that Johnson was away from Robinsonville for several years, and that by the time House saw him again he was already an old hand at playing jook joints (small country stores turned into dance halls on the weekend), house parties, and street corners. Far from having gotten a quick fix of hoodoo magic, he had put his talent and considerable drive during this period into learning his craft, and had studied under a guitarist named Ike Zinnerman. House's starry-eyed wannabe had in fact made himself into a seasoned professional.

From this period on, Johnson would live the life of an itinerant musician, rarely staying in one place for more than a few days; as the song goes, hotfoot powder seemed forever sprinkled around his door. He traveled alone or with one or two other guitarists, some of whom have provided much of what is now known about him. Many remembered him as self-possessed, sure of his talent and his ambition, and personable and attractive in public, though also moody and liable to disappear without a word. He was described as slight of stature but a commanding performer, with "sharp, slender fingers that fluttered like a trapped bird" when he played, in the words of his sometime companion Johnny Shines. He was also fastidious about his appearance. "Robert could ride highways and things like that all day long," recalled Shines, "and you'd look down at yourself and you'd be as filthy as a pig and Robert'd be clean." One of the photographs of Johnson shows him in a natty suit and hat, legs crossed, guitar poised, smile brightly flashing. The man was an entertainer, and he knew that in the working-class venues where he appeared, elegance was in itself an attraction.

Escaping the Delta is not a biography, but Wald provides an extended recap of Johnson's life, which largely dovetails with the earlier portrait sketched by Peter Guralnick in *Searching for Robert Johnson*, published in 1989. Where he differs from many of his predecessors is in presenting Johnson not as a demon-haunted anomaly, but as a man very much of his time and milieu. And unlike generations of critics and musicologists, he treats the blues not as some ethnologically pure form of cultural expression, but as mainstream pop music, like jazz before it and hip-hop in its wake.

The evolution of the blues from the early big-band variety personified by Bessie Smith and Gertrude "Ma" Rainey into the more countrified (and male-dominated) sound of Blind Lemon Jefferson, Leroy Carr, and Charley Patton has been amply recounted. What bears repeating is just how much the country sound was developed by record companies seeking a new spin on the genre after the "blues queens" started declining in popularity. By the time Johnson began performing, this sound was already well established and had a familiar vocabulary of its own, comprised of a ready pool of musical riffs and "floating verses" that traveled virtually unchanged from song to song and singer to singer. Rather than the raw moaning of primitive naïfs, country blues music was often the work of savvy professionals, who studied one another's records and followed the latest trends just as assiduously as modern rock bands listen to their competitors. And few were more adept at retaining and adapting what they heard than Robert Johnson.

The commonly held image of Johnson is of a desperately shy loner who avoided human contact and couldn't bear to face

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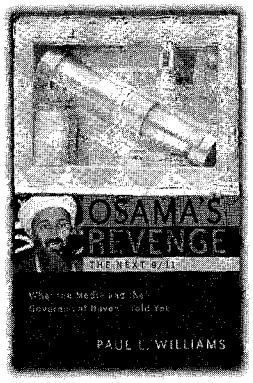

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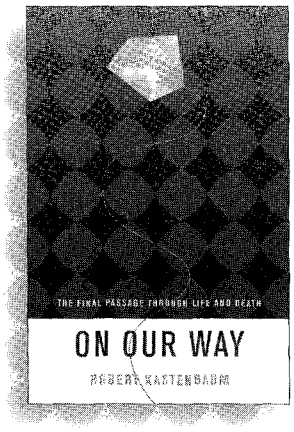

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his audience. This image has proven so durable that it is worth lingering over it for a moment. Many of my generation got our initial taste of Johnson's music from the Columbia LP re-issue of 1961, the liner notes for which cite the producer Don Law's recollections of the terrified young guitarist at his first recording session, facing the corner in order to play—an image so striking that Columbia chose it as the cover illustration of a second re-issue in 1970. Johnson probably did record facing the wall—but it may have had less to do with stage fright than with hiding his technique from the other artists waiting their turn, or perhaps with trying to improve his acoustics by "corner loading." By all reports, he seems to have had no trouble working the crowd at live venues.

On top of this, Johnson, like most of his contemporaries, had a far more extensive repertoire than surviving traces would suggest. Although recordings leave the impression that musicians such as House, Johnson, and Patton played all blues all the time, the reality was that, as traveling singers needing to draw a wide variety of listeners, they had to be conversant not only with the current hits but also with a mixed bag of jazz, country, and ethnic standards. "A performer whose entire recorded repertoire consists of blues," notes Wald, "might have been making his or her day-to-day money playing in a jazz group or a country hoedown band, or even plinking out Neapolitan mandolin melodies in Italian restaurants." We can hear this in some of Johnson's own oddities, such as the hillbilly swing number "Last Fair Deal Gone Down" and the up-tempo jive "They're Red Hot," the kind of humorous "hokum" that was common fare for crowd-pleasers like Tampa Red and the Harlem Hamfats. No doubt there were many other such oddities, which never made it onto wax for the simple reason that Johnson was being marketed as a blues singer.

One of the most riveting sections of Wald's book is his song-by-song discussion of Johnson's two recording sessions, which took place in a San Antonio hotel room in November 1936 and in Dallas in June 1937. What comes to the fore, apart from a fascinating dissection of how Johnson crafted (and sometimes recrafted) his material, is how much both he and the American Record Corporation were, in Wald's phrase, "going for some hits." Both the order of songs recorded and the company's choice of which cuts to release bespeak a conscious attempt to produce a commercially successful record, one that would launch the career of a new and untried artist.

The first session did, in fact, yield Johnson's only relative hit, the double-entendre-laden "Terraplane Blues" ("When I mash down your little starter / Then your spark will give me a fire"). Listening to the recordings bears out Wald's contention that Johnson before the mike was nothing if not a pro, fully in control of his arrangements. Some of his alternate takes are so similar to the originals as to be virtually identical, with every "whooo" and "mmmm" falling at the exact same time. Others show him rendering the same song in different styles, perhaps as a reflection of how he retooled his own material in live performance, or possibly to see which version would appeal more to the record-buying public. "Phonograph Blues," for instance, was played first with the slow tempo and accompaniment of "Kind-hearted Woman Blues," then immediately afterward with the uptempo boogie arrangement of "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom."

COURTESY AMISTAD

Robert Johnson, Memphis, circa 1935

But most striking of all, from a post-1960s perspective, is how little original material Johnson actually contributed to the blues idiom. Even leaving aside his covers of recognized standards such as "Walking Blues" and his obvious remakes of recent hits—"Sweet Home Chicago" reprises Kokomo Arnold's "Old Original Kokomo Blues"; "32-20 Blues" is so closely modeled on Skip James's "22-20 Blues" that at one point Johnson mistakenly lapses into James's lyric—we are left with a body of work that constantly draws upon and repeats itself: "Terraplane" resurfaces as "Stones in My Passway" and "Milkcow's Calf Blues"; "Ramblin' on My Mind" is a twin to "Dust My Broom"; "Kindhearted Woman," Johnson's most characteristic arrangement, returns as "Dead Shrimp Blues," "Little Queen of Spades," "Me and the Devil Blues," "Honeymoon Blues," and "Phonograph Blues"; and so on. With the exception of three or four truly unique pieces, it is not unfair to say that Johnson produced only about half a dozen songs in his career.

He was not alone in this, of course: listening to the collected works of blues artists, whether Tampa Red, Blind Willie McTell, or Lightnin' Hopkins, is often an experience of déjà vu all over again. Personal style takes precedence over variety, and that's part of the charm. Moreover, these records were made to be released two songs at a time, not to be compared side by side. Yet the point remains that the more closely we examine the music itself, the harder it is to pinpoint just what sets Johnson apart from his contemporaries. And in fact, as Wald posits, Johnson's legacy in some ways derives more from posthumous perception than from what he accomplished during his life.

HIS LIFE WAS ALREADY CLOSE to an end by the time Johnson first entered the studio. He had spent the previous five years roaming the South and as far north as Chicago and Detroit, making the kind of modest but viable living that any traveling musician can recognize. In other words, he had traced for himself a career that was respectable but not remarkable. As Wald points out, even after his first recordings were released, they elicited more admiration for a local boy made good than recognition of a unique genius:

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> In Mississippi, Johnson's work was hardly greeted as revolutionary. His most celebrated talent, if we are to judge by the reports of his contemporaries, was his versatility, his ability to pick up new guitar parts as if by magic and to command a vast range of styles.... No one would have asked him to be more passionate than Son House and more soulful than Skip James [the two bluesmen to whom Johnson is most often compared today]. In fact, at that time there would have been hardly any listeners who were familiar with both House's and James's work, since they came from opposite ends of the Delta and their records sold poorly. It was much more impressive to be able to sound like Leroy Carr, Peetie Wheatstraw, and Kokomo Arnold, national stars familiar to every blues fan.

Wald prefaces these remarks by describing a class that he once taught, in which he played for his students a number of the great Delta figures who had preceded Johnson, and finally Johnson himself as the epitome of country blues. But instead of being duly impressed, the class "looked at me blankly. What was so special about this? ... My students' reaction, far from being stupid or ill-informed, was closer to the reaction of most 1930s blues fans than mine was.... Which is to say [they] were in the rare position of approaching Johnson by way of the records that preceded and surrounded him, rather than coming to him by traveling backward from the Rolling Stones via Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters—the path taken by virtually all modern listeners." These sentences contain the kernel of Wald's thesis, which is that Johnson, while indisputably "a unique and extraordinary artist," is heard these days through so many filters—musical, mythical, promotional—that we have all but lost sight of his true artistry.

The story of how this came to be constitutes the final section of Wald's book. It is populated by well-meaning naïfs such as the aforementioned Don Law and the wealthy jazz collector John Hammond, both of whom helped to launch the myth of Robert Johnson as an untutored wunderkind; a host of later-generation enthusiasts such as Samuel Charters, Peter Guralnick, and Pete Welding; and on through the mainly British blues-rock guitarists of the 1960s. Hammond, as is well known, had thought to include Johnson in his landmark Carnegie Hall concert "From Spirituals to Swing" in December 1938, only to find that Johnson had died several months before. He instead played two of Johnson's records at the concert, thereby establishing a definition of the "Delta blues style" that, for white audiences, has remained virtually unchanged and unchallenged for sixty-five years.

By the time of his resurgence, Johnson's fan base had become almost exclusively white, while black fans were listening either to more contemporary blues artists such as B. B. King, Bobby "Blue" Bland, and Etta James, or to newer currents such as soul and funk. The dichotomy, according to Wald, simply extended a divide that had always existed:

> Black fans in the 1930s heard [in Johnson] a good singer and writer in the contemporary blues mainstream, with a solid beat, interesting lyrics, but little to distinguish him from a lot of similar and far-better-known stars. The few white fans who heard him at that time seem to have considered him a brilliant rural primitive. In the 1960s, mainstream black blues buyers who stumbled across an LP reissue of his work would have heard a guy who sounded like the old-fashioned countrified music their parents or grandparents might have liked. Meanwhile, young white fans were embracing the same recordings as the dark, mysterious, and fascinating roots of rock 'n' roll.

In other words, while a generation of white college boys, music critics, and rock musicians was rhapsodizing about Robert Johnson, the children of his original fans ignored him the way their white counterparts ignored Perry Como.

For Johnson fanatics of my generation, what turned us on even before the original versions were the reinterpretations that we all knew by heart: "Crossroads" by Cream, "Love in Vain" by the Rolling Stones (oddly credited to "Woody Payne"), or "Traveling Riverside" by Led Zeppelin, not to mention the enticing glimpse of the Columbia reissue on the cover of Dylan's *Bringing It All Back Home*. Not only did Johnson's reputation precede him, but so did the reputations of our most hallowed rock heroes. It was Dylan, in fact, who once made the shrewd comment that (in Wald's paraphrase) "the difference between the old blues singers and the young interpreters of the 1960s was that the young performers sang as if they were trying to get into the blues, while the older artists had been singing to get out of them." Wald takes this a bit further, suggesting that while Johnson was seen by his black contemporaries mainly as a bridge out of rural poverty, for modern white audiences "he has been the dark king of a strange and haunting world, lost in the Mississippi mists and harried by demons—a legend more earthy, violent, and passionate than anything in our daily lives."

In his memoir of Johnson, Peter Guralnick speaks of the "apocalyptic effect" the music had on him and his friends, and points in particular to the terror produced by songs such as "Hellhound on My Trail." The fact is, the song is terrifying, and stark, and thrilling, as few others in the blues idiom can claim to be. When Johnson sings in a voice of high-pitched desperation, with hard-bent strings weeping behind him, "I can tell the wind is risin' / The leaves tremblin' on the tree," who doesn't feel the loneliness and panic of someone standing alone in a storm at night, with no shelter and nowhere to go? The song works because, whatever the specific context, it is a terror that we have all felt, and when we hear it, we really hear it. The sheer emotion of it can be overwhelming. Eric Clapton and Keith Richards can find an outlet for that emotion by absorbing Johnson's music into their own; but for writers such as Guralnick and Welding, the outlet is words, and when trying to convey something so raw, it is difficult not to tip into hyperbole. Only an outsized legend seems big enough to carry it all, made larger with every retelling.

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But what the legend hides is that many of these songs were, at bottom, less a cry *de profundis* than a plea for sympathy or, more to the point, a seduction attempt. Enormously attractive to women—one girlfriend called him "the cutest little brown thing you've ever seen in your life"—Johnson had a well-deserved reputation for his ability to score one-night stands, though perhaps not so much for the sex as for the meal and warm bed that went with it. "Women, to Robert, were like motel or hotel rooms," recalled Johnny Shines. "Heaven help him, he was not discriminating. Probably a bit like Christ, he loved them all. He preferred older women in their thirties over the younger ones, because the older ones would pay his way."

As Wald points out, blues music before the 1960s revival had a primarily female audience, and Johnson's alternate emphasis in his lyrics on sexual braggadocio and self-commiseration shows that he knew his public. Even "Hellhound," for all the genuine depth of its distress (or perhaps aided by it), contains the unmistakable message that if only some "little sweet rider" among the crowd would take him in for the night and "keep his company," everything would be fine. It might please us today to think that this was a vain hope and that no human love could cure the singer's soul-sickness, but it no doubt pleased Johnson more when the strategy worked, as apparently it often did.

And finally too often. A central element of the Johnson legend concerns his mysterious death, variously attributed to gunshot, stab wound, or syphilis, but always involving a woman. The most credited version holds that Johnson was killed by the manager of a small jook joint near Greenwood, Mississippi, where he was playing an extended gig. On Saturday, August 13, 1938, believing that Johnson was sleeping with his wife, the manager (or, in some tellings, the wife herself) slipped him poisoned moonshine after one of his sets. According to David "Honeyboy" Edwards, who was traveling with him at the time:

> About one o'clock Robert taken sick when he was playing. All the people ... was begging him to play, and he played sick. And they said he told the public, he said, "Well, I'm sick, y'all see, but I'm playing, but I'm still sick. I'm not able to play." And they said he played on and about two o'clock he got so sick they had to bring him back to town [about fifteen miles away].

Other accounts described Johnson, driven mad by the poison, "crawling around the floor and barking like a dog." Johnson died the following Tuesday, August 16, and in the end it probably wasn't so much the poison that killed him as a bout of pneumonia that attacked his body when it was too weak to resist. The details remain uncertain, but what seems clear is that the death caused very little stir, most locals figuring that Johnson was just a wife-stealing dandy who got what he deserved. The blues historian Mack McCormick, who reportedly has been writing a full-length biography of Johnson, cut to the heart of the matter when he termed the incident "a casual killing that no one took very seriously." The police did not investigate the murder, and no one was ever charged.

Escaping the Delta has the merit of presenting a thesis that contradicts much of the received wisdom about the most honored figure in blues history and making it sound like common sense. Wald offers a persuasive and unconventional portrait of Johnson as a skillful, ambitious creative artist rather than the antisocial misfit of folklore. More, he traces the twin evolutions of Johnson's reputation among his peers and among the predominantly white fans who began to co-opt him almost from the moment of his premature death. "When Robert Johnson became a mythic, god-like figure, it was as part of the European religion of art, not any African-American spiritual tradition," he notes. He re-inserts "classic blues" back into the current of mainstream pop music from which it sprang, showing how Johnson and his contemporaries were striving for the same success and acceptance that teenage garage bands dream of today. And if Wald states his point somewhat repetitively, and with an occasional touch of didacticism, he can be forgiven: the Johnson myth is well protected, and Wald will doubtless encounter a fair amount of resistance.

Most notably, Wald parses the mix of originality and derivation that has brought Johnson's music so strongly into the present day. He examines the crucial connection between the more "moodily soulful" pieces, such as "Hellhound on My Trail" and "Come On in My Kitchen," and works such as Skip James's eerily idiosyncratic "Devil Got My Woman," pointing out how atypical and unrecognized such now-acknowledged classics were at the time of their recording. Conversely, he notes how one of Johnson's primary contributions to the blues idiom—the rapid slide triplets and driving one-two bass rhythm, derived from boogie-woogie piano, that to Johnson's audience "must have sounded astonishingly modern and exciting"—has since been used by so many guitarists that it has become a nameless cliché.

One might not agree with all of Wald's assertions. One can even reject his entire argument, though I find much of it convincing. But there is a distinct pleasure to be had from listening to the man expound. Wald is a professional guitarist, as well as a music teacher and a critic. He has spent many years absorbing not only the blues, but also the venues in which it is played and the life that surrounds it. And while he is admittedly one of those later-generation white fans he describes, he also demonstrates an understanding and an objectivity about Johnson's songs that lets them stand on their own merits, while clearing away much of the hocus-pocus that has been applied to them over the decades. More than anything, what shines through this book is the sheer, informed love of the music.

This sense of enjoyment marks one of the primary differences between *Escaping the Delta* and *Robert Johnson: Lost and Found* by Barry Lee Pearson and Bill McCulloch. Published only months before Wald's book, it covers much of the same ground and cites many of the same sources, as if the authors had kept peeking over each other's shoulders. At the same time, there is an evident difference in tone and purpose between the two: where Wald is mainly interested in replacing Johnson in his original context, in allowing us to see him as his contemporaries did, Pearson and McCulloch are out to indict the mythmakers and to debunk the legends that now surround him. And while Wald approaches his topic with the ease of a man certain of his beliefs (or, in some cases, comfortable with his uncertainties), Pearson and McCulloch frequently display the vehemence of proselytizers, almost an exasperation. Like the Blues Brothers, they are on a mission from God.

Admittedly, there is cause for exasperation. The myth of Robert Johnson

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is thick-hided and seemingly impervious to contradictory evidence. It surfaces in such mainstream tripe as the film *Crossroads* (1986) and in the work of serious scholars such as Guralnick, who should know better, as well as in Alan Greenberg's screenplay *Love in Vain* from 1983, in which the taciturn Johnson comes off as a guitar-toting High Plains Drifter. Most recently it has been seen hovering behind Martin Scorsese's series of documentaries for PBS, modestly titled *Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues*. Both the stuffy series and its well-stuffed companion book are full of good intentions and a true reverence for the music, but they are tainted by Scorsese's pomposity about American popular culture, and one need only recall his earlier description of Johnson as a "haunted prophet who must go into the desert to find his voice" to know which side of the myth he is on. (That said, the Scorsese anthology does contain some fine pieces, notably a howlingly funny essay on lyrics bawdy enough to make lines like Johnson's "You can squeeze my lemon 'til the juice runs down my leg" sound like a picnic recipe.)

Pearson and McCulloch examine a number of the commentaries on Johnson since his death, tracing the origins of the various myths the better to deflate them, but they reserve the bulk of their prosecution for the devil-at-the-crossroads legend. That legend did not originate with Johnson, of course: the huckster Legba and his demonic bargain are fixtures in African folklore, and similar pacts were ascribed to a number of bluesmen, from Peetie Wheatstraw, the "Devil's son-in-law," to Howlin' Wolf. In Johnson's case, however, it has become such common coin that even those not normally given to such fancy have been caught defending it. Guralnick, for instance, as paraphrased by Pearson and McCulloch, absurdly claims that "the soul-selling legend is the highest tribute that could possibly be paid to Johnson." Isn't it more of a tribute to recognize that the man had talent, and that he was able to convey that talent despite all the stones that poverty, hardship, and self-destructive behavior set in his passway?

The crossroads legend has fed on numerous pieces of "evidence," ranging from Son House's offhand innuendo about "Little Robert's" sudden mastery to Johnson's own song titles ("Hellhound," "Me and the Devil Blues"). Still, very little of this holds up to serious scrutiny, and Pearson and McCulloch's argument that "supernatural themes haunted not Johnson's music itself but *discussions* of Johnson's music" has a resonant ring to it: one would have to be extremely invested in the story to keep believing in it after reading these two books. But modern blues fans do like their brimstone, and many will no doubt find it hard to release Johnson from his Faustian bargain.

Much more unfortunately for Pearson and McCulloch, their book seems a bit redundant in comparison with Wald's fine volume. The research appears solid, and in some instances they make their point more completely than Wald does, but the prose and the structure also have a slightly plodding, academic feel, not helped by the authors' occasional dips into condescension and humorlessness. It is their very zeal that helps make their book sound flat by comparison.

At one point, Pearson and McCulloch cite a question posed by the magazine editor Peter Lee: "Would we still be as mesmerized by [Johnson's] music," Lee wonders, "if there were no mystery surrounding his life?" Both books argue that, for many, the answer would be no. But it might be more accurate to say that many simply wouldn't have heard Johnson's records at all. Or, like Wald's students, they would have taken these records simply as part of the long blues tradition, and guiltlessly preferred the work of Memphis Minnie, or Blind Willie Johnson, or Buddy Woods, or Bukka White.

And yet there is something undeniably potent about Robert Johnson's music that cuts through the noise of decades and the static of hype. His records contain moments of near perfection that quietly reveal themselves after repeated listenings: the delicate solo in the first take of "Kindhearted Woman," the lilting slide break and murmured aside in "Come On in My Kitchen," the sexy swagger of some of his middle eights. One truly gets a sense of this when listening to anthologies like the Smithsonian's compilation *The Blues*, a four-CD overview that stretches from Blind Lemon Jefferson to Ray Charles. The set contains many memorable performances, but Johnson's stand out as few others can, commanding your attention and daring you to confuse him with his peers. Does it matter whether he sold his soul or worked his long fingers to the bone to best his competitors? The fact is, he bested them.

Myths are born for a reason. Well before the posthumous Grammy award and Hall of Fame induction, before the double-CD packages and the websites, there was something about Johnson's small body of work that set imaginations whirring. Researchers have ferreted out obscure town records and cloudy recollections; critics have added layer upon romantic layer to the legend, not because they sensed a good story but because the music forces one not to leave it alone, to do more than simply listen and appreciate. Something so emotionally stirring must have sprouted from unearthly roots, it seems to say. No one could have been that good without a boost from the beyond. The reality is, no one *is* that good, and therein lies the sad danger: the more Johnson's music is hyped, the more difficult it becomes to appreciate its actual beauties.

Similarly, we resist the image of Johnson making music as a career, rather than out of some dark compulsion. The idea of a man producing those sounds largely out of a desire to sell records seems unthinkable. His persona seems able to accommodate nearly every sin in the book—Satanism, womanizing, murder ("32-20 Blues"), pimping ("Little Queen of Spades"), alcoholism ("Drunken Hearted Man"), fecklessness—except for one: venality. Likewise, our own sense of romance rebels at the idea of creative genius coexisting with a banal drive to carve out a living.

In this regard, perhaps the most honest comment on the Johnson legend comes not from the many pages written about it but from Eric Clapton's recently released CD of covers, *Me and Mr. Johnson*—not from the record itself, which is competent though rarely inspired, but from the small insert that advertises Clapton apparel, key rings, and other paraphernalia. It is easy to dismiss this as base commercialism: many artists have made that particular pact with the devil. In recent years, Robert Johnson has become a similar industry through no doing of his own, to the enrichment of his copyright holders and the Sony Music Corporation. But there is no point in fantasizing that he was too pure or too haunted to indulge in such self-promotion. If Johnson had had access to these marketing tactics during his lifetime, I have little doubt that he would have exploited them to the fullest. And his music would have been just as brilliant—no more, no less. ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Tough

THIS IS WARTIME, WHICH IS no time to be soft. The terrorists are tough, and so we must be tough. I am feeling tough, and toughly I feel also that too many children are being killed by the right side in this war, by my side, by Americans and by Israelis, in whose actions I am differently and willingly implicated. It is not all the same war, of course, unless one accepts the Bush administration's reduction of all our enemies into one enemy, a simplification better suited to sermons than strategies. The operation in Rafah was, I think, a foul mistake, but Israeli soldiers in Gaza are more obviously protecting Israel from terror than American soldiers in Iraq are protecting America from terror. Anyway, both armies are increasingly taken up with "force protection," which is not a justification of war but a consequence of war, and an ominous measure of the distance that separates them from their political objectives. But, as I say, I am suddenly haunted, and perhaps I should be ashamed of the suddenness, by the images of the dead children. Whatever the precise numbers of the dead Iraqi children in Mogr al-Deeb and the dead Palestinian children in Rafah, they are too high. ("How many dead children is too many is a question often asked by Palestinians and Israelis," James Bennet wrote in *The New York Times*, in the most ethically scrupulous piece I have read in a newspaper in years, "but it shows no hint of being resolved.") I was not taught by any of my traditions to look away from such developments. A war that asked for a quickening of conscience cannot now ask for a relaxing of it. I understand that this makes me no longer trustworthy among the "warriors" in town, but all I can say is that the injury to trust has been mutual.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE DEATH OF ISRAELI children at the hands of Palestinians? I resent the question for its assumption that sympathy is compromising, a moral deformation, a kind of infidelity; that decency should accept political direction; that you can be sickened by Palestinian children with guns or by Palestinian children in shrouds, but you cannot be sickened by both. Still, the question deserves an answer. Of course one's own dead mean more than the other's dead, but the other's dead cannot mean nothing. The primacy of the obligation to one's own, the natural solidarity of the same, the love that precedes principle: These fundamental attainments of human association should not be taken to suggest that moral consciousness is essentially tribal. Indeed, the knowledge of our own mystic bonds is what enables us to imagine the mystic bonds of others. Since we are particular in our affections and our affiliations, we can understand particularity of affection and affiliation in general. A general understanding of particularity: That is a fine definition of universalism, and there are no escapes from universalism, except willed ones.

THE QUANDARIES OF HUMANENESS IN wartime exploded into scandal in Israel last week, when Tommy Lapid, the minister of justice, reported on the radio that at a meeting of the Cabinet, at which he opposed the demolition of more Palestinian homes in Gaza, he had remarked that "I did think, when I saw a picture on the TV of an old woman on all fours in the ruins of her home looking under floor tiles for her medicines—I did think 'What would I say if it were my grandmother?' " Lapid's grandmother perished in the Holocaust, and so the denunciations began. Lapid, it was said, had compared Israelis to Nazis, which is to say, he had committed the mortal sin of moral equivalence. His words were certainly fierce, but they came from his heart and not from his head; and their origins in his heart do not embarrass them. Plainly Lapid does not believe that he sits in a government of Himmlers. He merely took pity on an old woman in a catastrophe because she reminded him of an old woman in a catastrophe. If no adversity can be likened to the Jewish adversity of the 1930s and 1940s, then all the instruction about the moral centrality of the Holocaust will have the perverse effect of stripping the Holocaust of its moral centrality, since it will no longer serve as a reference point in the analysis of contemporary evil. (The view that Omarska was not Auschwitz was partly responsible for the idleness of the Clinton administration during most of the Bosnian genocide.)

IT IS PAST TIME TO APPLY A LITTLE mental pressure to the doctrine about "moral equivalence." Intelligent reflection about policy and history proceeds by analogies. These analogies are always made with respect to an attribute of an object or an event, never to the entirety of it. Otherwise things could be validly compared only to themselves, and we would learn nothing. Some analogies will be right and some will be wrong, but none will be perfect. The wrong ones must be criticized, but generally not as a form of blasphemy or treason. Most of the right-wing heresiologists who scream "moral equivalence" at the sight of an inconvenient similarity intend mainly to shore up their own thinking or to shut down the thinking of others. (They had no compunction about comparing Saddam to Stalin.) And what is compassion, if not an exercise in moral equivalence? The care that we feel for people other than ourselves is the result of regarding us all, the subjects of our concern and ourselves, under a single and highly general description, which is the description of the human. There is no way to pursue justice without believing in the moral equivalence of all men and women. The idea that small-town Americans can bring democracy to small-town Iraqis is also a version of this belief. But everyone has their preferred equivalences, just as everyone has their preferred corpses.

THERE IS A LOT OF TALK OF TOUGHNESS in Washington now. After Abu Ghraib, conservatives are warning of a weakening of will. Sherman on war is frequently adduced. "War is a terrible thing," Brit Hume manfully declared the other day, "and terrible things happen in war on all sides." At the Palm they are agreeing that it is time to *finish this thing*. But it is the task of soldiers to finish this thing, and it is the task of citizens to consider this thing. This war was not just an act of will, it was also an act of mind: It was launched for reasons, arguments, values. If the conduct or the course of the war appears to defy those reasons, those arguments, or those values, there will be a necessary quarrel, and it will not be entirely a political quarrel, and it will be the task of officials to justify this thing. The theory of just war is not the theory that it's just war.

LEON WIESELTIER

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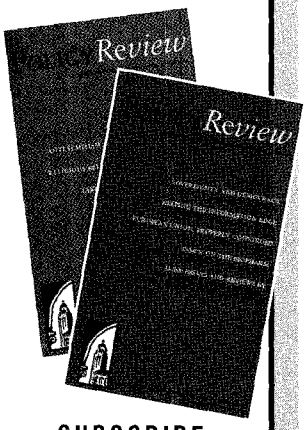

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In the new issue of Policy Review

Israel and the Question of the National State

An unjust anachronism?

The legitimacy of the Zionist enterprise was, we know, contested from the outset. But **when it comes to legitimacy, it is not ideological posturing but history that is the final judge.** The history of Israel's creation, which is still being written, has not yet produced its moral balance sheet—and thus is incommensurate with the experience of nation-states whose security has been established for centuries. Tony Judt does not contest the legitimacy of the French nation on account of the Frankish invasions or that of England by stigmatizing the armed expedition of William the Conqueror. But he haggles over Israel's legitimacy for its supposedly anachronistic character.

—Ran Halévi

Teacher Pay, Teacher Quality

Are teachers overpaid?

While, on the whole, teachers are not underpaid, good teachers, those working in tough circumstances, and those with critical skills are often wildly underpaid. **The flip side is that mediocre teachers are overpaid, sometimes substantially.** In the past few years, the notion of the "$100,000 teacher" has come into vogue. In books like *The Two-Percent Solution* and *The $100,000 Teacher,* authors such as Matthew Miller and Brian Crosby have called for paying good teachers $100,000 or more. Miller and Crosby are right. If we are serious about attracting and retaining the energetic and talented practitioners we want, we need to pay our best, hardest-working teachers that kind of money. Overlooked in these discussions, however, is that a number of teachers already earn that kind of money.

—Frederick M. Hess

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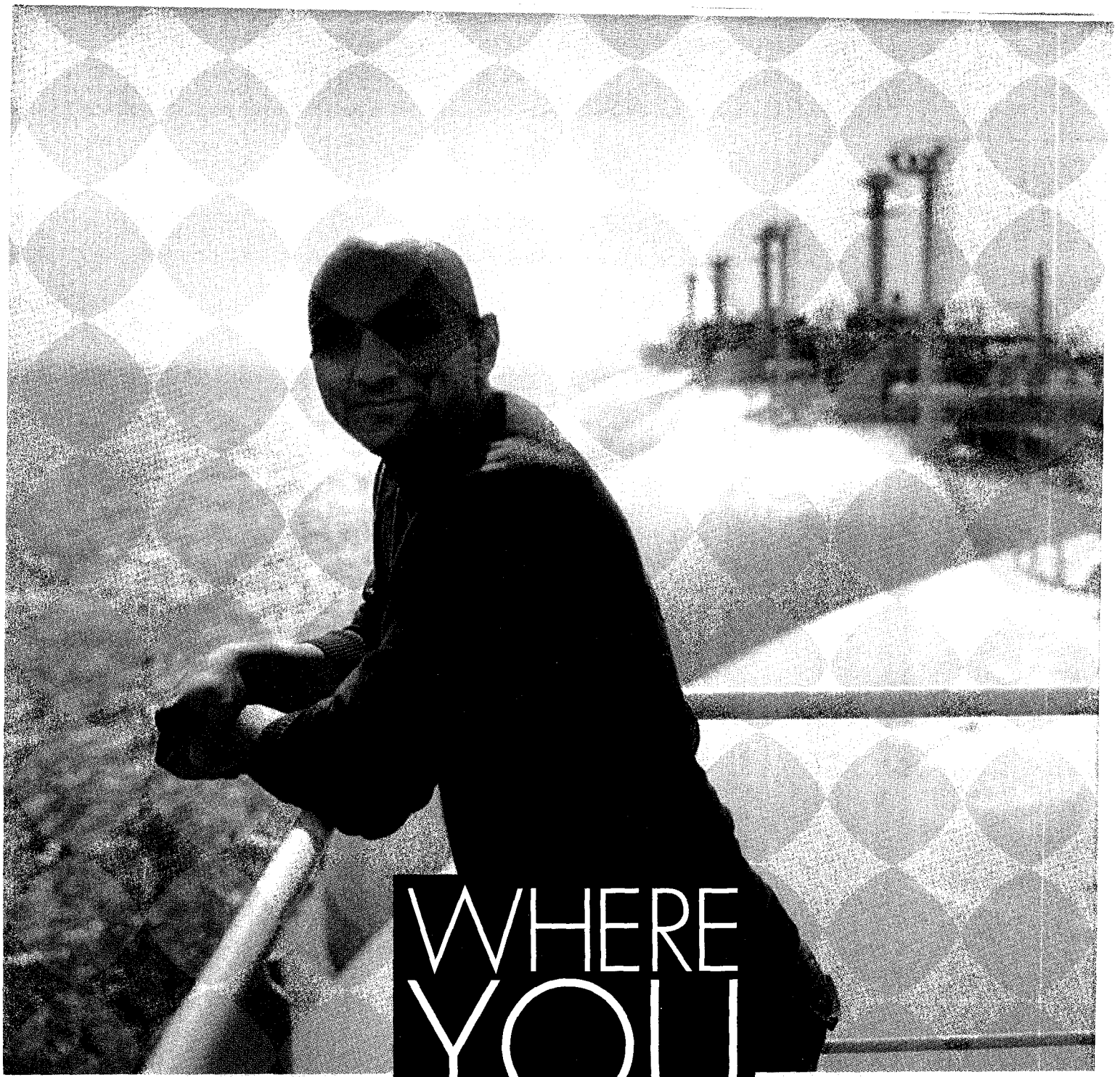

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Behind Sam Singh, master of a Shell G Class tanker, sit 135,000 cubic meters of liquefied natural gas (LNG). On deck, it's a balmy 77°F. In the insulated LNG containers, it's minus 320°F. Sam's tanker is just one in our specialized fleet that carries over nine million tons of LNG around the world every year. They bridge the gap between places like Brunei, Oman and Nigeria, with an abundance of natural gas, and markets with a rapidly rising demand like the U.S. We have been investing in our LNG operations for over 40 years. Now these efforts are paying off handsomely. Within 10 years, the number of our LNG plants will have doubled. So too will the number of countries we supply. Why? Because by 2025 gas, the cleanest fossil fuel, could well have overtaken oil as the world's predominant source of energy. Developing and connecting the gas markets of the world is an increasingly crucial business in which no one matches our expertise and commitment. And if people like Sam have anything to do with it, no one ever will. Visit www.shell.com/lng to find out more about our Gas & Power business.

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